Reviving Gogol: "Diary of a Madman" in the Modern Scope

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Reviving Gogol:  
_Diary of a Madman in the Modern Scope_

An Honors Thesis  
Presented to  

The Faculty of the Department of Theater and Dance  
Bates College  

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  

by  
Nathaniel James Stephenson  

Lewiston, Maine  
March 28, 2018
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Introduction

This thesis project began, as only seems appropriate, in Russia. In the fall of 2016, I discovered a program that, through the International Foundation for Theater Education and Research (IFTER), provided for a six-week intensive training session at the Moscow Art Theater School (MXAT). I reached out to Professor Katalin Vecsey of the Bates College Theater Department for assistance in seeking funding for this program. Professor Vecsey had long had in mind a concept for a one man show based on Nikolai Gogol’s short story “Diary of a Madman”, and she saw this as the perfect opportunity for me. She invited me to work on this project with her as my two-semester acting Honors Thesis project, and suggested that I apply for a Phillips Fellowship Grant in order to pursue this project. Furthermore, she assisted me in drafting a grant proposal, entitled “Diary of a Madman: Russian Theatrical and Cultural Contextualization in Moscow” (Appendix A). On February 14th, I was notified I had received the requested $4,500 from the Phillips Fellowship Committee and I would be able to pursue my research in Russia.

In its conception, the Madman project was entirely distinct from the version that was first presented in Bates’ Black Box Theater from November 9th to November 15th. Only months before my application for funding was submitted, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, and the news was full of rumors about the new reigning party’s possible collusion with Russia before and during the 2016 election. Therefore, the potential for social commentary in this script seemed both relevant and intriguing. I mention my excitement for integrating elements of this political intrigue into the show in the “Project” section of my proposal:

1 The abbreviation “MXAT” will be used for the majority of this thesis to refer to the Moscow Art Theater School (also known as the Moscow Art Academic Theater); however, the abbreviation “MATS” will occasionally appear, due to the fact that at the time of my application to the program I was unaware of the school’s name in Russian, Московский Художественный академический театр, which gives the acronym “MXAT”. “MXAT” is used more widely than the anglicized “MATS”.
The current political climate between the United States of America and the Russian Federation is another facet of this study in which I am greatly interested, and hope to learn more about while attending MATS, with the potential of incorporating this knowledge into the adaptation (Stephenson).

Professor Vecsey’s original schema was to have a totally updated story with Trump and his daughter Ivanka in the roles of the company president and Sophie respectively, and having Putin replace of the King of Spain. The central character Poprishchin would have been a low-level employee working in Trump Tower and would have been privy to incriminating information about the Russian collusion. It would have been the crushing anxiety and paranoia of his guilty conscious that drove him insane, rather than his delusions of grandeur.

Ultimately, this plot design was abandoned as it was decided it would have rendered the thesis too rigidly tied to a specific time and place. Additionally, the tumultuous nature of the Trump presidency suggested that, by the time the final production was presented, the themes chosen would not hold the same relevancy, inherently dating the project. Therefore, the plot line detailed in Appendix A does not reflect the realities of the final product.
I: Preparation

I.1: Hands-on Experiences in the Homeland of Gogol

I spent six weeks of the summer of 2017 in Russia, from May 23rd to July 5th. With the exception of a five-day cultural excursion to Saint Petersburg, I spent these six weeks working, 9:30-5:30, six days a week, at the Moscow Art Theater School. The program’s syllabus included training in Droznin movement, stage combat, ballet, folk dance, singing, and acting. There were also weekly lectures in Russian theatrical history with Mr. Alexander “Sasha” Popov, the current Producer of International Projects at the Moscow Art Theater and Associate Head of Producing and Theatre Management at MXAT. During his lectures, he explained to us at length the history of the Moscow Art Theater, as well as several contemporary issues in the world of Russian theater. For instance, the day I arrived in Russia, police had stormed the house of the artistic director of the Gogol Center, Kirill Serebrennikov, a leader in Russian avant-garde theater. Mr. Popov explained that several controversial productions that had recently been performed at the state-run Gogol Center had caused some uneasiness among government officials, and that this police operation was most likely a government coup to replace Serebrennikov with a more regime-friendly artist under the pretext of an embezzlement investigation. This affair was of great interest to me, and seeing the theater named after the very man I was researching embroiled in a scandal that combined art, bureaucracy, and (as our script of *Madman* puts it) “power and money” (Vecsey 21), only further convinced me that there was a deep truth in the story that needed to be explored.

The training elements of the program were grueling, particularly our movement classes. We were instructed in a theory of movement known as “Droznin movement”. Andrei Droznin is a Russian director who pioneered a school of physicality that is still taught at MXAT today. It
seeks to use intense strength and coordination exercises “‘not to prepare [one] for stage tricks, but to make connection between body and mind, body and soul, so when [one feels] something, [one] will immediately express [oneself]’” (Gewertz). The basic idea of Droznin movement is essentially to learn how to control your weight and to coordinate the body, mind, and soul, to better portray a character—the body should serve, not hinder. Our first Droznin class began with the teacher, Vladimir Sazhin, or as he was known to us, Vlad, insisting that we jump up into the air and, as he put it “stay there. Simply don’t come down.” The class later progressed to the instruction of weight-sharing partner lifts and stunts, and each twice-weekly class increased the intensity of the exercise and the goal of the stunt. Though six weeks is not enough time to fully grasp the Droznin technique, by the end of the program the ensemble was capable of completing more than a few of these partnered lifts.

Ultimately, what I drew from seeing performances by actors fully trained in this method was a sense of lightness in their movements and physicality. There were certain performances we saw in which the actors performed the exact poses we were learning in class, but as I knew that Madman would be a solo piece, I knew that including these partnered exercises would be infeasible. Nonetheless, the Russian sense of lightness was something that I really hoped to capture in my performance.

Other training courses, like ballet and stage combat assisted in the athletic and acrobatic elements of movement. The ballet class did not turn me into a world-class dancer, but it certainly did make me more conscious of the positioning of my body and how to coordinate it through space. Despite the fact that most classes were spent with Irina Nikiforova, the instructor, slapping my ever-bent knee and shouting “Колени!” (“Knees!”) at me to correct my posture, my flexibility and coordination doubtlessly improved over the course of the intensive program.
Stage combat was also a useful type of training for the project. The type of stage combat taught at MXAT is unlike anything I’ve dealt with before, in that you are taught how to safely make physical contact with your partner, whether it be punches, kicks, slaps, etc. I was able to incorporate some aspects of this newfound Russian physicality into this thesis project during the rehearsal process.

The physical training provided by the school was an engaging and exciting way to hone my endurance (a requirement for an hour long solo performance), to add new considerations for the physicality of any character, and to augment my overall work ethic. Nonetheless, it was the eighteen hours a week I spent in acting classes which had the largest impact on my philosophy of acting and my approach to it.

The theory of acting taught at MXAT is perhaps the most famous method of acting, Stanislavski’s system. Developed by Konstantin Stanislavski in the early 20th century, this method is centered around the use of an actor’s mind to activate emotional memory and experience in order to pursue a character-driven objective. This extensive system of acting cannot be mastered in only six weeks, but it was taught to us through an exercise known as etude work. This practice was entirely unbeknownst to me before my time in Russia, but the course required the ensemble to develop a new etude for every single class and I quickly became familiar with the practice.

There are three different kinds of etudes, but the one practiced most frequently by the IFTER ensemble was the event etude, a small, mostly improvised scene lasting no more than five minutes and consisting of three parts: some given circumstances, an event, and a denouement.

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2 This inclusion will be discussed in chapter II.2
3 Although not as extensively covered in the IFTER/MXAT syllabus, the atmospheric etude and the character etude are the other two forms of etudes. The application of all three kinds of etudes will be covered in Chapter 3.2.
Once developed, these scenes can be revisited and refined to heighten stakes, strengthen objectives, and solidify character relationships.

For instance, I directed an etude called “Camping” which featured two of my classmates, Emma and Reece, and myself. In the original edition, the three characters (all friends) were camping (given circumstances), when I left the campsite at night to go to relieve myself. After a few moments, Emma and Reece heard me scream (the event), and had to decide what to do. They faced their fears of the dark woods to find me with a twisted ankle in the woods near the campsite (denouement). This plot outline was the only established element of the etude; dialogue, blocking, and the duration of the scene were all left to be discovered during the presentation, allowing for a more organic reaction to the event.

Alexey Rozin and Sergei Shchedrin, the acting teachers, praised the original “draft” of the etude for its concept, but felt that it could have been stronger in its event and denouement. They invited me to reformulate it and after conferral with my scene partners, we chose a new plot that proved to be much stronger than the original. It was now Emma that left the campsite at night, and while she was gone, Reece turned to me to tell me that he planned to propose the next morning (event). My character’s lack of enthusiasm at this news caused Reece to ask what was upsetting me, which then forced out the truth: I was in love with Emma. Emma re-entered the campsite, the argument paused, and my character decided to leave the couple alone, and went to sleep, sacrificing his own happiness for their sake (denouement).

This revision of the scene was a stronger product for two reasons: one, because the character relationships (a couple and their friend) was more interesting than the original (three friends), and two, because the event was based around human emotion and desire, rather than some unknown fear. It served as an important reminder of the fact that a character must always
have an objective; “I don’t want you to marry her” is undeniably stronger and easier to play
towards than an open question, like “How should we help our friend?” This training is
Stanislavskian at its very roots, since by enacting this experience, one expands their emotional
memory. Furthermore, it underlined the idea that an actor must have an objective towards which
their minds and actions are directed. This is a vital lesson which many student actors, myself
included, are wont to forget.

Finally, my research with IFTER allowed me to experience undiluted and organic
Russian culture. The most exciting opportunities granted by the IFTER program were the
included admissions to a multitude of theater and dance performances, as well as a cultural
excursion to Saint Petersburg. It was ultimately these aspects of my time in Russia which most
influenced my thoughts on the upcoming thesis project. The five days spent in Saint Petersburg
were invaluable. In addition to allowing me to see some of the most important cultural landmarks
of Russia (such as the Hermitage, the Summer Palace, and The Church of the Savior on Spilled
Blood), I was able to contextualize the setting of Gogol’s short stories “The Nose”, “The
Overcoat”, and “Diary of a Madman” (belonging to a collection called the Petersburg Tales).
Having a fuller understanding of the milieu in which these stories were originally written
permitted a more complete comprehension of the nuances of the text which might have been lost
in its adaptation to modern stage play.

It was, however, the professional theater that I was exposed to that inspired my approach
to the thesis project. In my forty-two days in Russia, I saw thirty-four live performance events,
including dance performances, operas, musicals, and straight plays, both modern and classical.
The sheer volume of content that I saw gave me a sense of what the objective of contemporary
Russian performance is, as well as an idea of its qualities that I truly appreciated.
All the plays that I saw rank among the most impressive and memorable performances I have ever seen: visceral, gut-wrenching, impressive, and unapologetic. Indeed, Mr. Popov explained during one lecture that the idea that an audience should be able to enter a theater, be entertained, and leave is regarded as highly bourgeois and outdated. Instead, there has been a greater push to direct plays in a manner that unsettles and even disgusts theatergoers. For instance, the first play we saw in Moscow was Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Flight (Бег)*. The play lasted four hours, and the first ten minutes of the play consisted of a woman sitting on a stool in a center stage spotlight, shaking, while men ran past her, shouting and leaving small plastic cups of water on the ground. As the cups accumulated on the ground and the woman’s shaking began to knock them over, two banks of twelve enormous speakers blasted out a deep unearthly groaning sound which became louder and louder until it was truly unbearable. When it was all over, I found myself physically drawn up into my chair, arms wrapped around my body, with my face contorted into a grimace. So intense and overwhelming was this sense of anxiety and fear that I, a non-russophone audience member, had an extremely physical reaction. I relayed this story to the theater department back at Bates and I believe the idea of creating an uncomfortable space greatly influenced the final presentation of *Diary of a Madman*.

Two technical qualities of Russian theater made a great impression on me as well; the first being a reliance on and the implementation of technology, and the second being a practice I started calling, for lack of a better term, “scenic disrespect”. The use of technology typically manifested itself in the use of devices like television screens and projections. However, in Dmitry Krymov’s *Tarabumbia (Тарарабумбия)*, the surface upon which the actors played was

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5 Premiered in 2010 at Dmitry Krymov Laboratory, Moscow, Russia. Dir. Dmitry Krymov. [http://eng.krymov.org/performances/tarabumbia/](http://eng.krymov.org/performances/tarabumbia/).
one enormous conveyor belt. “Scenic disrespect”, on the other hand, appeared in a plethora of manifestations. This term refers to the tendency for any given performance to involve the ripping, smearing, scratching, painting, cutting, or general destruction of the scenic elements of the performance. I was fortunate enough to be able to see a highly controversial play at the Gogol Center, Müller Machine (Машина Мюллера)⁶, based on the works, diaries and letters of Heiner Müller, author of the 1977 postmodernist drama Hamletmachine, and directed by Kirill Serebrennikov. In this play, naked actors poured wine and smeared yogurt on themselves, punched through projection screens, and threw sheaves of paper into the air. A production of Anton Chekhov’s Uncle Vanya (Дядя Ваня)⁷ we saw in Saint Petersburg involved Sonya quite literally taking an axe to a set made mostly of paper and cardboard on wood frames, dragging it to center stage, dousing it with a gasoline canister, and finally lighting a match before reconsidering and blowing it out. On a much simpler level, in the Tabakov Theater’s production of Chekhov’s The Three Sisters (Три сестры)⁸, Kulygin actually shaved off his mustache during the performance. I was absolutely fascinated with this practice and became intent on incorporating it into the design of my thesis performance.

One of the most important theatrical productions I encountered was a performance of Gogol’s The Government Inspector (Ревизор)⁹ at the Yermolova Theater on July 4th, the day before I returned to the United States. The production was done with almost no words, and the story was conveyed through exaggerated pantomime and music. The scene in which Khlestakov writes back to Saint Petersburg about the town officials was staged so that Khlestakov used his

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walking stick to “dictate” to Osip by using his walking stick to puppet each town official to portray their faults. For instance, Khlestakov used the stick to give the foolish magistrate a hunch. He then raised one of the magistrate’s arms into a shrug and the other so that the magistrate was hitting himself in the head with his own gavel. Meanwhile, Osip sat typing on top of an enormous tower of desks, while a score based around typewriter clicks gave the scene a frantic and mocking air.

This production allowed me to see what a staged Gogol play was really like: absurd, clever, and satirical. Through it, I gained a sense of what my performance and the production as a whole should encapsulate. Seeing The Government Inspector produced not only in Russia but at a theater directly across the street from MXAT, is a distillation of the benefits of pursuing this program: the access to arts, culture, skills, and a perspective unavailable to me anywhere else in the world. The next morning, I flew back to the United States; although unaware of what awaited me in the coming months, I felt fully prepared to begin developing my one man thesis show, Diary of a Madman.

I.2: Researching the Project

I.2.i: The Life of Nikolai Gogol in Summation

Although most well-known for his works in Russian, Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol was not technically a Russian author. He was born in the Ukraine in 1809, and was later sent to pursue his education in the northern city of Nizhyn. In 1828, he moved to Saint Petersburg in an attempt to join the civil service, but found only low-paying jobs (“Nikolai Gogol”). After self-publishing a Romantic poem, Hans Küchelgarten (1830) which met such critical failure that “Gogol tracked down as many copies as he could find and, true to form, burned them, his next book, Evenings on
a Farm Near Didanka (1831-2), received near universal acclaim” (Power). Over the following years, Gogol experienced great success in his writing career, publishing the majority of his most respected works, including plays like Marriage (1835) and The Government Inspector (1835), and the short stories “Diary of a Madman” (1835), “Nevsky Prospect” (1835), “The Nose” (1835), and “The Overcoat” (1842). The popularity of these works today echoes their popularity during Gogol’s life, proving his mastery over the satirical. At his death in 1852, only the first third of his final masterpiece “Dead Souls” (1842) had been published; Gogol himself burned his manuscripts of the second part of “Dead Souls”. Gogol was and continues to be celebrated as one of the finest prose writers of modern times, and having the opportunity to work so closely with one of his texts was an honor and a challenge.

1.2.ii: Historical Research of the Original Short Story

In order to translate the mind of Poprishchin to the twenty-first century, one must understand the roots of the story and how its implications echo Nikolai Gogol’s contemporary Russian society.

“Diary of a Madman” was originally published under the name “Записки сумасшедшего” in Saint Petersburg, Russia, where like many of Gogol’s works, “Diary of a Madman” had a paradoxical reception. The conservative traditionalist writer found himself vilified by conservative critics for his alleged concentration on the “dirty” qualities of Russian life, while the liberals and radicals hailed him as a champion of the downtrodden “little man” and as a social critic (Cornwell 334).

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10 Zapiski Sumashshego—“Memoirs” or “Diary” of a Madman”. Though the story is most well known as “Diary of a Madman”, the version translated by Claude Field (2014) which was used as the basis for this thesis project’s script is translated as “Memoirs of a Madman”.

14
Nonetheless, this story falls into a collection of four related short stories known as the “Petersburg Tales”: “Nevsky Prospekt” (1835), “Diary of a Madman” (1835), “The Nose” (1836), and “The Overcoat” (1842). All four of these stories are set in the city which lends its name to this collection and contain satirical, frequently surreal themes which critique the society of the day. Many of his characters are mid-to-low ranking figures in the social service. Professor David Herman of the University of Virginia notes that “after one achieved the 8th rank, hereditary nobility came with it. That is to say that if you were to reach the 8th rank, this level of ranking would be given to your heirs. Thus this 8th rank was very sought after” (Herman). As the role of titular councillor is the ninth rank, as described in his table of ranks (Herman), Gogol’s characters’ violent struggles to move up in the world are contextualized. In “The Nose”, a titular councillor obsessed with his social standing awakens to find his nose has taken on a life of its own and risen above him in the quantifiable ranks of Russian society, while in “The Overcoat”, a poor clerk named Akaky desperately scrimps for months to purchase a new overcoat, which is quickly stolen by street thugs. After receiving no help from the police, he dies and his vengeful ghost haunts the streets of Saint Petersburg until it steals the police general’s coat and disappears. Although these stories criticize the bureaucracy which pervaded every aspect of Russia under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, “Diary of a Madman” is particularly interesting in that it contains “one of the oldest and most complete descriptions of schizophrenia” (Altschuler). Not only does Gogol examine society’s influence on the human mind, he explores the mind’s effects on itself.

It is also interesting to note that though Gogol is credited as one of Russia’s finest writers, he was not, in fact, Russian. Sergei Davydov explains that “Gogol came from the Ukraine, of a family of provincial Cossack gentry” (122). However, in her book Nikolai Gogol:
**Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism**, Edyta M. Bojanowska notes that “only a gradual recognition of his talent and his new writings on Russian themes led critics later to reclassify Gogol as a Russian writer” (78).

Perhaps it was his outside eye that granted him such perspicacity in his satires of Russian society. Certainly, “Diary of a Madman” contains themes which both mock the strict bureaucratic hierarchy of imperial Russia and are deeply personal to Gogol himself. Most evidently, “Diary of a Madman” marks itself as a companion to “The Nose” and “The Overcoat” not only because Gogol sets them all in Saint Petersburg, but because all of the main characters hold low-level civilian social ranks and seek to improve their standing. Indeed, Poprishchin holds the same rank as Akaky Akakievich in “The Overcoat”—that of “titular councillor”—only one rank below Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov of “The Nose”.

The struggles of all of these characters, but especially those of Poprishchin, echo the life of Gogol himself. Gogol himself had taken a poor-paying job as a scribe in the Saint Petersburg civil service in 1830 (Peace) in order to survive while focusing on his art. It is hard to ignore the parallel between Gogol’s aspirations for fame and Poprishchin’s delusions of grandeur, that both desperately clung to while working a soul-crushing survival job.

Poprishchin also shares Gogol’s fascination with the human nose—indeed, “for Gogol, the nose was the most important part of the human body” (Davydov 126). There exist several references to the olfactory organ within “Diary of a Madman”, but three are particularly notable. The first comes on page 10 of Claud Field’s translation of the story: Poprishchin has gone to find and take Meggy’s letters from Fidel, but when he arrives at Fidel’s house and tries to pick the dog up, he insists that “[he] wanted to take hold of it, but the abominable beast nearly caught hold of [his] nose with its teeth” (Field 10). So powerful is his adoration for his nose that any risk
to it detracts from his ultimate mission. It may be thought that this nasal fixation is just a general example of self-preservation, but later when Fidel “[bites him] in the calf of the leg” (Field 10), he carries on about his business, uninterrupted.

These anxieties manifest themselves once again after Poprishchin is placed in the asylum. Poprishchin derides “that pungent smell over all the earth which compels people to hold their noses” (Field 19), insisting that “this makes the moon so fragile that no men can live on it, but only noses. Therefore we cannot see our noses, because they are on the moon”. He then becomes overwhelmed by dread concerning the safety of the noses of the world, saying “When I now pictured to myself how the earth, that massive body, would crush our noses to dust, if it sat on the moon, I became so uneasy, that I immediately put on my shoes and stockings and hastened into the council-hall to give the police orders to prevent the moon sitting on the earth” (Field 19). Even in his psychosis, Poprishchin is greatly aware of his nose, and his awareness is mimicking the self-consciousness that Gogol expressed throughout his own life.

Finally, the nose appears as a symbol in the final, absurd line of the short story: “And do you know that the Bey of Algiers has a wart under his nose?” (Field 21). From an acting perspective, it was important to be able to find a motivation for this line, and my eventual interpretation was that it functioned in two ways. This statement is a feeble boast about Poprishchin’s perceived standing among the high and mighty—he touts his familiarity with the Bey of Algiers, an obscure and ultimately insignificant political leader. Additionally, it is also a subconscious recognition of his true status: in order to see the wart under his nose, Poprishchin would have to be below the Bey, looking up at him. However, in the introduction to Nikolai Gogol: Plays and Petersburg Tales, Richard Peace explains another aspect of this final line: “The Russian expression ‘to leave someone with a nose’ (s nosom ostavit’) suggests that he has
been made to look foolish” (Peace, xvi). These three motives all paint the picture of a meta-critique of the character and the author at once.

“Diary of a Madman” is a fascinating story in that it is at once alienating and deeply human. Although Poprishchin’s mind is fraying and eventually unravels entirely, we understand that his condition—his aspirations, insecurities, and his position within his society—come directly from Gogol’s own experiences. It is through the contextualization of the story with its historical milieu that grounds it in truth and relevance, and what makes it worthy material for reproduction in this modern era.

1.2.iii: Research of Past Productions

The stage adaptation of the short story “Diary of a Madman” is not a new phenomenon. Recently, there have been several productions across the world which have used Gogol’s original short story as a base. In creating our adaptation, we chose to examine three notable recent productions. Although not a comprehensive survey by any means, the selected performances are the Harvey Theater’s 2011 production in Brooklyn, New York, the Gate Theater’s 2016 production in London, and in the same year, Katona József Színház’s production in Budapest Hungary. Each of these performances are distinct from one another and unique in their own right, embodying and emphasizing the story’s themes and Gogolian elements in different ways.

The only other American production to be examined sets itself apart from Bates’ own instantly, as its lead actor is, Australian. Geoffrey Rush plays the central role of Aleksii Proprishchin, accompanied on stage by Yael Stone, who plays all the women in Poprischin’s life: Tuovi, Sophia, and Tatiana. This small cast list leads us to an examination of several artistic choices employed in this performance.

The script used for the Rush production, as shown in the New York Times’ video excerpt
(Excerpt: 'Diary of a Madman'), is an adaptation, but not a modernization of the original story. It includes two new characters, Tuovi and Tatiana, but leaves out Mawra, the servant to whom Poprishchin refers several times throughout the original text. Having not seen the production, it is difficult to say whether this benefitted the play or diminished its power, but in Ben Brantley’s review of the production, he states that

> [t]hough Ms. Stone is just fine as (among other characters) the little Finnish charwoman who becomes Poprishchin’s ally, including her was a mistake, I think. Her very presence, both disturbed and admiring, sentimentalizes Poprishchin, and when he’s finally taken away by the white coats, he’s part Blanche DuBois, part Saint Sebastian (Brantley).

This seems to distance the play from some of the themes of universality which this thesis project strove to attain. However, in the same review, Brantley implies the existence of several qualities in Rush’s performance that were also targeted in my own: “This is meant to be one of those shows that’s funny until it isn’t, at which point everything you laughed at earlier is cast in a sobering, retrospective shadow” (Brantley). There is an undeniable humor in Gogol’s works. Whether it be the caustic satire of The Government Inspector or the absurdism of “The Nose”, one cannot help but laugh at his writing. “Diary of Madman” is interesting in that it captures both sides of this spectrum of humor: we laugh when Poprishchin proudly announces that “To-day I sat in the director's room, mended twenty-three pens for him, and for Her—for Her Excellence, his daughter, four more” (Field 8), as well as when he insists that he wants “to have a little conversation with your dog” (Field 10). This being said, Rush’s performance focuses more on the absurd: Brantley’s review is titled “Send in the Russian Clown and His Pain and Alienation, Too”.

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In seeing production images, there can be no mistake that Rush is playing the clown: his nose is painted red in a Raggedy-Andy-esque splotch, and his makeup is exaggerated and flamboyant. Brantley’s description of his movement only serves to augment the buffoonery of Rush’s portrayal of Poprishchin: “The greatest pleasure of “Madman” comes from watching a great actor make such improbably articulate use of his body, in the manner of old stars of silent comedy like Keaton, Chaplin and Lloyd. His very walk is chaos given a form as precise as classical ballet.” (Brantley). Rush is clearly playing a Poprishchin unique to the world and atmosphere interpreted for the adaptation. His Poprishchin is specialized and far different from the universally-applicable Everyman who appears in this thesis performance.

The Rush production of *Diary of a Madman* sought to capture Gogol’s absurdism and capacity to write pain, within a world stylized to fit what were essentially the original circumstances of the story. Textually, it remains close to the original Gogol text—in terms of design, I can say that there is an undeniable resemblance between the Yermolova production of *The Government Inspector*. It is a recent adaptation of the story, although not a modern one per se. The next production to be examined however, is a truly modern script.

In order to understand how this story has been fit to suit our current world, we turned to Al Smith’s play, based on “Diary of a Madman”, and produced by the Gate Theatre. It instantly distances itself from the source material at first glance, for although the script bears the same title as the original story, the subtitle of the script reads “after Gogol”. Indeed, Smith’s script contains the familiar elements of the Madman story, but contextualizes them in a specific contemporary setting: Edinburgh, Scotland, during August of 2016.

Smith has also eschewed the one man show format in his script, but his additional characters are masterfully adapted to fit this new milieu. Poprishchin becomes Pop Sheeran,
husband to Mavra Sheeran, and father of Sophie Sheeran. He is a bridge painter who, like his father and his father before him, has spent his entire life endlessly painting the Forth Bridge in Edinburgh, a task which takes a full year to complete. His identity as master of his house and of the bridge is threatened however, when he boards his new apprentice Matthew, who has a sexual past with Sophie and who has come to test a new long-lasting paint which would render Pop obsolete.

The script’s themes are grounded in those of Gogol’s original story. Pop’s power and identity are undermined at every turn, just as Poprishchin’s are. However, Smith focuses much more heavily on Scottish national identity and history. Pop declares wistfully about the bridge that “on a hot day if she vibrates whilst the paint’s drying, the next morning if you clench your jaws you can run your finger over the top and play the ScotRail timetable through your teeth” (Smith 9). Immediately, the symbol of painting is tied inextricably to history and clarifies Pop’s obsession with keeping this job that his family has done for generations and which, in a sense, preserves Scottish culture. Furthermore, Pop’s Sisyphean painting of the bridge associates itself with the apocryphal definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Without a doubt, this is a purely Scottish play. The text is written in a dialect to complement the setting, and several plot points are shifted to complete the adaptation: the King of Spain is replaced with famous Scottish hero William Wallace, and Pop has visions of a stuffed animal of Greyfriars Bobby (a terrier who became famous for guarding the grave of its owner in Edinburgh), speaking to him in lieu of Meggy and Fidel.

With such clear themes appearing in so specified a setting, does Smith’s Diary of a Madman limit itself in terms of scope? Contemporary references abound, like those to Donald
Trump’s presidential candidacy and to the film *The Theory of Everything*, which limit the universality and timelessness of the script. Although universality was something which we strove for in the development of this process, the specificity of Smith’s script allow for deeper themes relevant to that particular moment. *The Telegraph*’s review notes that “it dares to posit a link between insanity and nationalistic fervency at a time when another independence referendum is back on the agenda” (Cavendish). So then, there is value in both the hyper-specified and the universally-applicable. In either case, this script stands as a masterclass in modernization, and served as a great inspiration for us.

Finally, the Katona József Színház’s production of Madman must be recognized. Much like Bates’ own, it is a one man show. It stars Tamás Keresztes, an actor whom I was fortunate enough to have seen in a 2015 production of Molière’s *The Miser* during Professor Vecsey’s Central European Theater and Film short term class. A recording of this production of *Diary of a Madman* allowed me to witness his performance, and his acting is truly incredible to watch. He exists in a small and twisted space, a shack warped “as if Van Gogh’s famous painting of his room in Arles has finally gotten its long craved third dimension” (Jászay). This shack is ultimately up-ended, the sparse floorboards becoming bars, to serve as the asylum cell. In other words, the production implements a physical manipulation of the world to suit the text.

Indeed, Keresztes is able to shape the world around him: his worn out shoes become the dogs he speaks to, their open toes representing the mouths which he hastily feeds in an attempt to bribe them in a phenomenal show of Gogolian absurdity. However, Keresztes’ most powerful delivery of Poprishchin’s developing madness comes through the use of a live looper. This electronic device uses his microphone to record and replay his speech, distorting it and developing a setting live on stage. In the first scene, he crumples a plastic bag and snaps his
fingers intermittently to build the soundscape of a rainy street, which then continues through the rest of the scene. In another, he drastically changes the pitch of his voice up and down to carry out an imagined dialogue. Although the set, costumes and props suggested a text fairly close to the original, the technology available to the actor allowed for a dramatic depiction of the augmentation of his madness: since he was creating every sound himself, the viewer is never quite sure what is real or what is a product of his madness. Furthermore, the use of a looper draws the mind once again toward the same definition of insanity that tied into Smith’s *Diary of a Madman*: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

All three of these modern productions of Gogol’s story represent unique ways of bringing “Diary of a Madman” to life today. Rush’s clownish physicality in the Harvey Theater’s production underlines Gogol’s infallible sense of humor, while Smith’s implementation of a truly modern setting echoes Gogol’s social critiques, and Keresztes’ use of technology lends itself to the early depictions of schizophrenia that make the story particularly notable. Each of these qualities modernizes the text at the same time as it follows Gogol’s tradition, and these three contemporary productions stand as proof of the lasting effect of Gogol’s writing and of its applicability to today’s existence.

**I.2.iv: Researching a Character through Cinematic Contextualization**

The rehearsal process began with a with fine-tuning of the text, and it was only after the first week of table work that the real staging work began. For reference throughout the rest of this chapter and beyond, I have provided a scene breakdown of the play:

- Scene 1: October 3rd. Everyman first hears the dogs talking.
- Scene 2: October 4th. Everyman obsesses over Sophie in the office.
- Scene 3: November 6th. Everman is ridiculed by the Chief of Staff.
● Scene 4: November 8th. Everyman goes to the theater.
● Scene 5: November 11th. Everyman talks to Meggy the dog and decides to seize Fluffy’s emails.
● Scene 6: November 12th. Everyman procures the phone from Fluffy’s house.
● Scene 7: November 13th. Everyman reads the emails.
● Scene 8: December 3rd. Everyman entertains the idea that he might be royalty.
● Scene 9: December 5th. Everyman learns of the succession crisis in Spain.
● Scene 10: December 8th. Everyman obsesses over the succession crisis.
● Scene 11: April 43rd, the year 3000. Everyman realizes he is the king of Spain.
● Scene 12: Marchember 86. Between day and night. Everyman announces his title at work and to Sophie.
● Scene 13: No date. The day had no date. Everyman decides to make a cloak out of his raincoat.
● Scene 14: I don’t remember the date. Everyman waits for the Spanish delegation.
● Scene 15: Date #1. Everyman goes to the airport to look for the Spanish delegation.
● Scene 16: Madrid, February 30th. Everyman is committed into the asylum.
● Scene 17: January of the same year, following after February. Everyman decides he has been taken by the Spanish Inquisition.
● Scene 18: The 25th. Everyman is abused by the “Grand Inquisitor”.
● Scene 19: 34 March. February, 349. After fighting his insanity, Everyman ultimately succumbs to it entirely.
Before rehearsals became too intense, however, Professor Vecsey gave me supplementary character research in the form of several films. The first was Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* (2000). This film shares the same basic themes as *Diary of a Madman*: insanity in the corporate world. The central character, Patrick Bateman, shares many qualities with Everyman. Each holds an all-consuming jealousy towards their superiors, and each has a preoccupation with his physical appearance. The only difference between Everyman and Bateman is that Bateman has enough agency to do something about his position: his occupational power grants him an opportunity to murder Paul Allen, and he is rich enough to afford his extensive beauty regime. On the other hand, Everyman’s poverty and impotence cause him to remain in stagnation. Any possibility of action is ultimately quashed by his insignificance; even when he gains entry to Sophie’s room in Scene 12, he only says a few words before leaving.

Nevertheless, there is something to be gained from the form of narration that the film employs. Bateman’s explanation of his daily beauty regime is simultaneously quotidian and unearthly. In listening to it, there is a calmness and solemnity in his tone that gives the listener the sense that while the body is present, the mind is elsewhere, which is an aspect of Everyman we practiced in rehearsal. Although the audience has no evidence of his insanity, we sought to instill a subtle feeling of discomfort through the narration of the opening scenes.

As Bateman says, “there is no real me. Only an entity, something illusory” (*American Psycho*) and although Everyman is not aware of his own insanity as Bateman is, the idea of an illusory being served to inform the first few scenes of *Madman*. At the beginning of the process, where I, as one actor alone on stage had no idea how to build a relationship with the audience, this idea of the “illusory being” provided me with a guiding perspective. This in turn provided me with a pursuable goal: “find the truth”. Because Everyman’s understanding of “the truth” is
so far removed from reality, his attempts to discover the this perceived reality would pull his mind from the actuality of his present state, alienating himself from the audience.

However, Professor Vecsey recommended I watch some of Spalding Gray’s performances as inspiration as to how to keep an audience engaged, as well as how to keep the audience implicitly involved without interacting with them directly. Gray’s energy and rhythms of speech provided an idea of how to incorporate a vocal dynamism into the performance to keep the audience’s attention. Combined with the Bateman-inspired goal, this research served to make Everyman unsettling and energetic.

Forman’s *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) was next on the list of required viewings. In its own way, this film is a diary of a madman. Similar to Gogol’s story, it traces the descent of a character (Randle Patrick McMurphy) into mental dysfunction. Although this character’s true mental state is called into question in the film, *Diary of a Madman* makes it very clear that Everyman is going crazy. Unlike McMurphy, however, Everyman’s intentions during this descent are not always clear. *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest* blurs the lines of what truly qualifies as mental illness, as McMurphy himself is not mentally ill, and his actions throughout the film force the audience to wonder about the workings of the human mind.

It was Nurse Ratched’s cruelty and Nicholson’s performance of the lobotomized McMurphy that was most relevant to my development of the character of Everyman. McMurphy faces inhuman cruelty while admitted to the mental institution, culminating in his spite-fueled lobotomization. From the beginning of the film to its end, we see McMurphy go from a spirited and intelligent man to a barely-functioning shell. As a human being, he is ruined. There is a distinct parallel between his treatment and Everyman’s, a man with aspirations and interests in the first scene, but a man irreparably destroyed by the cruel treatment he has received in the
asylum. For Everyman, there is no Chief with a pillow to grant him mercy. In fact, there is the opposite. “And did you know that the Bey of Algiers has a giant wart under his nose?”, the last, cryptic line of the play is a nail in the coffin of Everyman’s fate. Despite brief periods of lucidity, his mind has snapped the tether. He is past the point of no return. Seeing a similar arc in One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest helped me to understand the descent that Everyman undergoes, and I was able to use Nicholson’s performance as the lobotomized McMurphy as a reference for Everyman’s near-catatonic state in scene 10.

Finally, having never worked in an office environment, I elected to watch some lighter fare in order to impart some idea of the soul-crushing, identity-erasing atmosphere this kind of workplace can have: Office Space (1999). Ultimately, the film was not as helpful as I had hoped, but there was still something to be gleaned from Ron Livingston’s portrayal of Peter Gibbons’ quest to find freedom in his sterile environment. Much like Peter, Everyman searches for a way to break his tired old routine, his own version of the traffic montage at the beginning of Office Space. This served as another goal (to break free) during the rehearsal process and assisted me during scenes 7-15, in which Everyman strives to find meaning and purpose outside of his workplace identity. However, due to his own mental aberrations, he splits off from Peter’s path, entering into a perverted reflection of Peter’s own journey of self-fulfillment.

All in all, Everyman is a distillation of these three characters: Patrick Bateman, Randle McMurphy, and Peter Gibbons. I found the twisted perception of reality of Bateman, the descent and humanity of McMurphy, and the desire for purpose of Gibbons all inside Everyman, and it was these three films that spurred my initial character development.

However, for two specific moments within the show, I drew inspiration from another source: It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia, a television show whose unique and strong characters
and bizarre sense of humor made for great inspiration for this project. The two moments which this show inspired appear in Scene 7 and 9. Scene 7 culminates with an outburst of Everyman’s desperation, anxiety, and rage: “Liar! You little fucking dog! How dare you talk about me like this! As if I did not know you run on pure envy, there is this backstabbing at work—yes the backstabbing by the Chief of Staff. That man hates my guts; he has plotted against me, he is always seeking to attack me” (Vecsey 22). However, this momentary loss of his temper is immediately followed by a sudden regaining of clarity: “OK. I’ll look through one more email; maybe it’ll make things clearer” (22). I had some difficulty in understanding such a sudden swing in emotion and judgement, but one of my favorite episodes of *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, “The Gang Misses the Boat” (Season 10, Episode 6) contains a clip which provided an example of how another actor dealt with a similar sudden switch. In it, the character Dennis, portrayed by Glenn Howerton, shouts at a man for wanting to buy his car for the wrong reasons (00:16:17-00:17:00). Within the context of the episode, Dennis has been trying to control his notoriously bad temper, and at the end of the clip, he realizes he has lost it once again, and his sheepishness and sudden self-awareness perfectly fit the circumstances of scene 7, in which Everyman briefly recognizes and confronts his waning sanity.

Scene 9 contains a similar scenario, in which Everyman’s conspiracy theories threaten to overwhelm his psyche. This extreme level of emotion, this time of paranoia, was once again difficult for me to comprehend, but just as before, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* guided me in my development of Everyman and in the grounding of some of his wildest moments. In Season 4, Episode 10, “Sweet Dee Has a Heart Attack”, the character Charlie (played by Charlie Day) believes he has discovered a conspiracy in the company at which he holds temporary employment (00:16:18-00:18:34). In this scene, he is frenzy and panic given human form. He
searches for links where there are none, invents truths and realities, and much like Everyman, skirts the brink of insanity. There is an undeniable similarity between his line “There is no Carol in HR!” and Everyman’s “There is no kingdom without a king!” (24) and the fact that this scene is set in a low level position in a large company only heightens the parallels between these scenes. While American Psycho, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, and Office Space prepared me beforehand to portray the character of Everyman, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia guided me in particular moments along the way.

I.2.v: Adaptation of the Text

Largely, the updating of this text was carried out by Professor Vecsey. The first draft is dated August 24, 2017, and it focused mostly on correcting sentence structure and outdated references in the text. For instance, the very first line of the original translation is “A strange occurrence has taken place today.” This sentence would have been entirely incongruous if said by someone in a modern shirt and tie, so this first draft changed it to a such simpler “A strange thing happened today” (Vecsey 1).

One phenomenon encountered in this version was an over-correction in an attempt to modernize. The department-chief of the original translation, who became our Chief of Staff, chastises Poprishchin, saying “you make such confused abstracts of the documents that the devil himself cannot make them out” (Field 3). The first draft adaptation changed “the devil” to “Superman” in an attempt to tie into a later passage about women only wanting a superhero to love and nothing less. This section was eventually cut, and the “Superman” was switched to “God” because with no later text to justify it, it was incongruous and bizarre in the mouth of Everyman.
An over-specification of references also cut down on the ability to make our text universally applicable. In Scene 16, it was originally “the famous Stephen Hawking” that predicted the earth would sit on the moon, and in Scene 17, Everyman feared Christian Dior’s power and influence in France. However, just as references to Donald Trump in Smith’s *Diary of a Madman* grounded it squarely in 2016, a fear that references to specific celebrities and public figures would situate our *Madman* in a certain time and place caused us to avoid names and places\(^{11}\).

As previously mentioned, this fine-tuning took place over the first week of rehearsals. For two hours a day, Monday through Friday, Professor Vecsey, Rebecca Berger ’19 (the stage manager), and myself sat in Black Box Theater and poured over the minutia of the text. Our goal was to create a character, setting, and story that was ubiquitously modern at the same time that it was universal.

Ultimately, the largest textual requirement that we had to contend with was the letters that the dogs send to one another. How can these be contemporarily translated to fit the needs of the script? It was Professor Vecsey’s idea to have the correspondences be emails, and that Everyman would steal the dog’s cell phone rather than a sheaf of letters. This also allowed for one of the few props in the show: Fluffy’s cell phone. The phone, designed by Saleha Belgaumi ‘18, embodied Gogolian absurdism. It was a perfect replica of a white iPhone 6S, but its case was made of white shaggy fur, emblazoned with a pink bone. Perhaps it is Everyman’s deadpan treatment of this phone, his Pandora’s box and container of all the answers he desires, that delivers the comedic punch—the incongruity between what he sees and what we see is extremely characteristic of Gogol’s work.

\(^{11}\) This also is the root of the character’s name “Everyman”: destruction of a specific personal identity allowed for a sort of omni-relatable facelessness.
Textually, our goal was to create a modern world rooted in Gogol’s tradition. It is hard to say that Siri or Patagonia will stay as relevant to society in the future as they are today, but using them in the text did not create a time and place that can be exactly pinpointed. Instead, they lent themselves towards a *Diary of a Madman* of the early twenty-first century.

Creating our own version *Diary of a Madman* required finding our own form of adaptation. What we found was a kind of comprehensivity of time and place, allowing it to be distinctly modern, but generally applied. Features characteristic to the aesthetic of the early twenty-first century, such as simplicity and adaptability were sought after for elements of set, lighting, and costume design. Nonetheless, Gogol’s original work needed to be present in the project, and so the base script sought to guard his elements of absurdity. Neither entirely modern nor purely historical, the adaptation was truly our own.
II: Staging the Story

II.1: Elements of Design

Naturally, a text of the early twenty-first century must be accompanied by a set, lighting, and costumes that reflect this same aesthetic. The general aesthetic of today’s society is characterized by minimalism and versatility—this can be seen, for example, in smartphones which year by year, become slimmer, sleeker, and more capable. Through the set and lighting design of Professor Michael Reidy and the costume design of Carol Farrell, these qualities became adapted into the physical aspects of the production. Simultaneously, the technical design became as compatible with the updated script as with the original text. The design also had to consider the fact that, from its conception, this production hoped to be able to travel to Danbury, Connecticut for the Region 1 Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. There was an undeniable beauty and practicality in Professor Reidy’s set: two black aluminum frames on wheels, each one outfitted with nine computer monitors. The monitors could be quickly removed and the frames deconstructed for easy transport.

Furthermore, the set was extremely versatile. The eighteen monitors were controlled by three computers which allowed for a variety of images reflective of Everyman’s thoughts to be displayed. These images changed and flowed from scene to scene and even word to word; sometimes all nine monitors on one side would make up a mosaic of a single image, sometimes all nine contained an individual image. As the play progressed and Everyman’s insanity encompassed more and more of his being, the images on screen were able to portray his madness in a variety of ways.

The set was also capable of portraying the shift in setting from Everyman’s house to the insane asylum. Because they were on wheels, the pivoting of the house’s walls to create the...
asylum space\textsuperscript{12} denoted a clear shift in the setting of the play. By using black aluminum scaffolding bars to make these frames, Professor Reidy imbued the set with the undeniable connotation of imprisonment, well suited to portraying the symbolic prison of Everyman’s dead end job, as well as the literal prison of the asylum. Physically, the set perfectly suited the aesthetic needs of the play, but the set alone does not contribute everything needed to a production.

Professor Reidy’s lighting design followed the same minimalist functionality of the set. For the most part, the set was lit with cold, sterile, blue lights. It is impossible not to associate this quality of light with that given off by the screen of any mobile device. With eighteen screens behind Everyman, it seems as though they light his entire life. Everyman lives and dies by his blog and by the cellphone he steals from Fluffy. Professor Reidy’s lighting design contributes to the omnipresence of technology that pervades not only this play but the contemporary society upon which it comments.

Finally, Carol Farrell’s costume design truly helped to define who Everyman was. He is an office worker, certainly, so a shirt and tie are must-haves. However, it was the kind of shirt and tie that broadcast information about him. The short-sleeve shirt and thin tie created a bizarre visual incongruence—they seemed to actively go in two different directions, the tie stretching Everyman up and down as the wide silhouette of the shirt pulled him outwards. They were a subconscious reminder of the psychological battle between sanity and madness raging inside Everyman, but at the same time, they were a kind of blank canvas: they were black and white clothes in a cut familiar to the audience, which allowed viewers to project onto the character of Everyman. These clothes suggested, but they never insisted or demanded, leaving the audience to subconsciously fill in the gaps themselves.

\textsuperscript{12} Practicalities of this shift will be described in Chapter II.3
It was in the costume design that we were able to find space to incorporate an element of scenic disrespect. In my initial understanding of this project, my pipe dream was to include the creation of some sort of mess on stage—insanity is, after all, messy. This was ultimately not congruent with the sense of minimalism that was targeted in the rest of the design or with the academic schedule. However, my determination to include a nod to this Russian theatrical element became incorporated in Scene 14. The script demands that Everyman tailors a coronation cloak from his raincoat, so over a dozen raincoats were ordered to allow me to dissect one on stage every night.

Finally, the design for Everyman’s hair achieved a tripartite goal. The script required his hair to look “like a toilet brush” (Vecsey 20), and be shaved in the asylum, and it had to be a modern style. The “undercut” was decided on to satisfy these three requirements. It is an extremely popular style currently, and it combines a long top and short sides and back. Therefore, the top could be styled to resemble the toilet brush, while wrapping my undershirt around my head to leave only the sides and back exposed satisfied the third requirement. Once again, the versatility and modernity of the style was exploited for the ultimate benefit of the production.
II.2: Rehearsals

Rehearsals started in early September of 2017. A full rehearsal schedule can be found in Appendix B. As previously mentioned, the first week of the process was devoted to the updating of our newly edited script—it was only after this process that the real staging could begin, although there were minor edits made to the script throughout the process. Professor Vecsey encouraged me to make daily entries into a rehearsal journal in order to trace the progression of this thesis project. This ended up being a great help in the development of the play—it provided a judgement-free sounding board for me to see my own thoughts about the process. With no partners with whom to share a scene, there was no interpersonal feedback. Being able to write my thoughts out allowed me to critique them more objectively and to separate viable impulses from misguided ones and to follow them. My first rehearsal journal details my thoughts about the very first few rehearsals:

September 18, 2017

First of all, I recognize the ridiculous irony in keeping a mostly-daily journal detailing my descent into a mostly-daily journal detailing a man’s descent into madness. Nonetheless, here it is. This is now the second week of rehearsals, but the first week of rehearsals proper. Up until today, rehearsals have been devoted to putting final adaptations and updates on the script which is now, for all intents and purposes, finished. Just some interesting notes—syntax is a small thing that makes a very large difference in making things sound modern (notes of this can be found in my first script), as well as the fact that modern speech precludes, in a much more significant way than that of the speech of 1835 (if we can take
the translation as an accurate portrayal of it), making religious references—references to God and moreover to the devil have now been almost entirely removed.

Today’s rehearsal alerted me to the fact that this process is going to be unlike anyone I’ve ever undertaken. Not having a scene partner (or even an act or play partner) really requires a lot of an actor in ways that I can’t really articulate yet—but the attention is always going to be on me. I hope to figure out how to effectively use the space given to me; although there isn’t much which is helpful to me. When the walls open for the psych ward scenes, I think it’s going to allow me a lot of physical freedom.

This brings me to a second observation—I need to learn to build the play. The beginning scenes need to start off as normal as possible in order for the play to have somewhere to go by the end—Kati’s told me to be “internally intense” as opposed to “externally intense” which will come at the end of the show. Right now, I need to keep memorizing my text so I can get the script out of my hand ASAP. I’ve done research by watching movies, having seen American Psycho the other day. Gave me a lot to think about which I can start gently incorporating into rehearsal but the majority of the work will only get done once the script’s out of my hand (Stephenson).

This journal entry raises an idea which was central to my development of the character of Everyman and of the project as a whole: the idea of being alone on stage. Prior to Diary of a Madman, my only solo performance experience had been the delivering of monologues, and
giving an entire performance alone was a foreign and daunting task. Fortunately, the training I received at MXAT helped guide me in finding my own style—by thinking of the scenes as stand alone vignettes, I was able to apply my experience with etude work to this performance. In Scene 1, for example, the three major elements of etude work described in Chapter 1.1 are clear: Everyman is walking down the street (given circumstances) when he hears a dog speak (event) and, his interest piqued, he decides to follow it to its home “in order to follow up on this as soon as [he has] the chance” (Vecsey 5) (denouement). The event etudes allowed for a clear breakdown of these scenes and allowed for me to understand how to make strong choices within those parameters—a skill especially vital when one has no scene partners off of whom to play.

Additionally, the physical space of Black Box Theater was a great space to try implementing the second kind of etude taught to us by Alexei and Sergei: the atmospheric etude. The atmospheric etude seeks to emulate the kind of world in which the character resides through aspects like music and physical surroundings. The example given by Alexei was for someone rehearsing for Macbeth to run their lines in a dark basement, and to play any sounds that establish the environment of a castle: creaks, distant talking, or whatever music they feel appropriate.

The life of Everyman is hectic, bureaucratic, and alienated. Certain days, I particularly identified with the stress and anxiety of Everyman as stresses from schoolwork and rehearsals mounted, and just like in the script, sometimes my rehearsal journals became severely abbreviated, like on October 31: “Tech and poster photo shoot today. Progress was limited” (Stephenson). As Madman was a thesis project and Bates is an academic institution, my assorted deadlines and the various requirements for other commitments throughout the semester, combined with the rather sterile environment of many of the academic buildings created an
atmospheric etude that I could live in. I was capable of separating reality from fiction, certainly, but the stresses of my senior year were a valuable resource for empathizing with Everyman’s character. Furthermore, when I needed to heighten the strength of this atmospheric etude, I would frequently run my lines in Black Box Theater while I played R.E.M. from my phone.

I spent a great deal of time listening to R.E.M. during the process in my free time, between classes, and before performances. The lyrics of their songs, frequently nonsensical, are nonetheless tied together by some form of obscure logic. In “It’s the End of the World as We Know It”, Michael Stipe sings a list of four names: “Leonard Bernstein, Leonid Brezhnev, Lenny Bruce and Lester Bangs”. These names are linked only by their shared initials—the individuals to which they belong have nothing to do with one another. It is this kind of twisted reasoning that I found in their music that helped build my atmospheric etudes.

Furthermore, being in Black Box Theater outside of rehearsal hours was an alienating experience—a remote corner of the building, poorly lit and heated. It feels cavernous, and spending time alone in the space created strong feelings of isolation. I note in my journal on October 23rd that

\[t\]he monitors are all attached to the walls! It’s really a creepy feeling, seeing all eighteen of those blank, black rectangles just sort of staring out. They have no features at all but somehow there’s a personality to this set...not necessarily a good one, it’s sort of chilling. When the lights are out and you can only see the eighteen glowing white LEDs, it feels like the whole thing is sort of breathing (Stephenson).
When this feeling was combined with my own hectic daily schedule and the music of R.E.M., it made for a powerful atmospheric etude which assisted greatly in understanding the character of Everyman.

The final type of etude is the character etude. This is essentially taking the character of any given script and seeing how they would react in an event etude. Our acting teachers did not spend a great deal of time explaining this work, due to our limited time and its being the most difficult of the three kinds of etudes. They did, however, leave us with a reminder: the character etude, they told us, is like cleaning a weapon. You can take it apart and reassemble it to see how it works, but you must know why you are shooting.

I worked on this “why” with Professor Vecsey during a rehearsal on October 30th, tracing the progression of Everyman’s mental deterioration. Basing our ideas on a section from Richard Peace’s Nikolai Gogol: Plays and Petersburg Tales introduction (xiii-xiv), we divided up his descent into three distinct stages: normalcy (Scene 1-Scene 5, “Today I had an amazing inspiration.”), altered perception (“...amazing inspiration”-Scene 10), and finally megalomania (Scene 11-Scene 19). This breakdown allowed for a clearer progression of the character and helped me “build the play”, as I mention in my first journal entry.

Largely, the rest of the rehearsal process was a fairly typical one. However, in one rehearsal I was able to use my Russian stage combat training to safely execute a stunt for the production. Batraz Zaseev, our stage combat teacher, had taught us several varieties of rolling, from the basic somersault to a complicated blocked punch/arm grab, twist, and flip combination. In Scene 18, Everyman is forced out of the corner of his room by the Grand Inquisitor, and I used a simplified version of the somersault technique to accomplish this stunt effectively and
most importantly, safely, since there was no padding either on my body or in the performance space.

Additionally, many rehearsals were focused on the relationship between myself, the screens, and the audience. Ultimately, it was decided that the screens were purely representative of my mental faculties, and so I should have no direct interaction with them. There were occasions when I would speak in unison with characters on the screens, like during the Chief of Staff’s tirade during Scene 3, but this was a representation of how the Chief of Staff’s barbs and insults stuck in Everyman’s mind. The relationship with the audience, however, was less clear, and in the beginning of the process, I needed frequent reminders to stay open to the audience:

October 10, 2017

[...]I no longer exist in a left/right axis on my stage, but on a much more forwards facing one—basically I’ve opened myself up to the audience which I hope will help engage them. It’s a bit of a tricky transition for now but I’m sure I’ll get used to it in a few days. It also changes my relationship with space. Now, I’m much more directly connected to the audience, even if I’m not looking AT them—towards them is enough to make it seem as though this whole play is happening with the audience instead of as a private journal. Therefore, we’ve been trying to pinpoint a spot where that fact can become clear. Right now, the working spot is in scene 5—“Listen Meggy, now we are alone”. The hope is that this is a great enough shift (the first time I get down on my hands and knees or really do anything out of the ordinary) to draw the audience’s attention to
the fact that I’m starting to lose it. The line “now we are alone” should help suggest that it’s a private setting, too (Stephenson).

It was this last element of the show that truly needed definition. With lines memorized, screens programmed and coordinated, and all the elements of traditional tech in place, Diary of a Madman was ready to open.

II.3: Performances at Bates

Diary of a Madman opened for its initial run at Bates College on November 9th, 2017 in Black Box Theater. It was initially slated for a five-performance run, but a sixth show was added on the evening of Sunday the 12th to accommodate the schedule of Dr. Dassia Posner, the outside examiner for the defense board of this thesis project. A seventh show was later added on the 14th due to the seating restrictions inherent to Black Box Theater (which has a capacity of approximately 35 spectators).

On the night of Friday the 10th, we had two special guests in the audience, respondents from the Region 1 Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF): Father Richard J. Piatt, Director of the Rogers Center for the Arts and Professor of Practice in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at Merrimack College, and Jeannie-Marie Brown, Assistant Professor of the Department of Theater and Dance at Keene State College. The Department of Theater had requested their presence at the show so that they might evaluate not only my own acting for admission into the Irene Ryan Scholarship Audition, but the show as a whole so that we might be able to present it at the Region 1 Festival. After the show, Professor Vecsey, Rebecca Berger, and I were able to participate in a response session with Father Piatt and Professor Brown. Their feedback was very complimentary and much of their praise was
directed toward the technical elements of the show, which left a large impression on them both. They were also impressed by the size of the project that I as a undergraduate student was taking on alone. They told us they were placing the show on hold for presentation at the Region 1 KCACCTF—a promising step in the show’s potential to travel.

Father Piatt and Professor Brown’s impressions were not entirely representative of the overall response to the show. Over the course of the run, the audience’s reactions were interesting and varied—some nights, they were extremely perceptive to Gogol’s bizarre sense of humor, and laughed along with the jokes. Other nights, lines such as “Again with the dog food!” (Vecsey 19) were met with empty silences. Despite this, every single audience was clearly aware of the progression of Everyman’s madness. Even the audiences who were not audibly laughing at the beginning of the show were still enjoying the seemingly frivolous quirks of Everyman’s behavior. In contrast, there was always a palpable sense of dread that hung in the room by the end of every performance. From my perspective, it was interesting to see when the audience would stop laughing—for many, it was after Everyman bursts into Sophie’s room in Scene 12. Some would continue laughing while Everyman insists that the French are behind his imprisonment in Scene 17. Nonetheless, by the time Everyman screams for his mother at the end of Scene 19, the audience was silent and I could frequently make out a grimacing face or a body contorted away from the stage among the audience members.

A large part of the power of this performance came, I believe, from the claustrophobia imparted by the proximity of the set to the seating, which an unavoidable element of the Black Box Theater After having placed the show on hold during our response session on November 10th, the production team was notified on December 11th that the Kennedy Center Regional College Theater Festival accepted Diary of a Madman to perform at the Region 1 competition. A
The revival run was set for the 26th and 27th of January in Gannett Theater, a much larger space than the Black Box Theater.

The purpose of this second run was threefold. Most simply, it was a chance to re-rehearse the performance with all technical elements before presenting it at KCACTF, over two months after closing its original run. On another level, it was to allow anyone who was unable to see the original run a chance to see this unique production. Finally, it was a chance to test out the impact of the show in a larger space. Professor Reidy had visited the Studio Theater at West Connecticut State University, the future venue for Madman, and discovered that it was a small performance space, but still considerably larger than Black Box; we hoped to recognize any inherent differences in the performance and use them to prepare for KCACTF.

Due to the shape of the available playing space, the manipulation of the set in the scene change between Scenes 15 and 16 was altered: the new staging was much wider, so the walls had to open flat, facing the audience, instead of opening up away from the audience to face each other. It was a necessary change, but the change was so that the symbolism of Everyman entering through two doors and creating a prison at the same time was lost. However, the new position of the set allowed the entire audience to see both sets of screens, so it came with its benefits as well.

One new quality that I and several members of both the production team and the audience who had seen the performance in both venues noticed was that the sense of claustrophobia was much less distinct in Gannett Theater than in Black Box Theater. Due to the wider playing space, the larger theater, and the increased distance between the audience and myself, the audience felt less oppressed by the physical elements of the performance. However, I felt as though my performances were more energized since I had more area to play in; my motions could be more exaggerated and free than in Black Box. As I say in my rehearsal journal from the 24th of
January, “I now have a larger place to go mad in. That is to say that instead of a sort of crushing, creeping sense of madness setting in, there is a ranting, raving lunacy to it now. Just an alternate take on the same themes” (Stephenson).

Both of these venues had different elements which made for two distinct editions of the production. Although I preferred performing in Black Box Theater due to its claustrophobia which I felt was reminiscent of the production of Bulgakov’s Flight I had seen, Gannett was a valuable intermediary step between Bates and the West Connecticut State University’s Studio Theater.

II.4: Performances at KCACTF

II.4.i: Critical Responses

Diary of a Madman was performed twice at the Kennedy Center American College Region 1 Theater Festival, both on the 1st of February. They were both received well by the audiences due in no small part, I am sure, to the high concentration of actors and theater-makers in the audience. After these performances, we were able to have a talkback session with our two assigned responders, Michelle Bombe, Professor of Theater at Hope College and National Vice Chair of the KCACTF, and Patrick Dizney, Assistant Professor of Theater at Central Washington University and Chair of KCACF Region 7 (see Appendix C for a full transcript). This opportunity was a valuable chance to talk with two extremely experienced theater makers. Professor Bombe is both an actor and designer, and to hear her impressions of how the character and the set acted together to form a cohesive world was extremely heartening. Hearing that my acting complimented the text and set, as well as that these latter two interacted well together to create a cohesive world (especially when thinking back on our original goals of script adaptation
and set design) increased my confidence in the power of my thesis project. Professor Dizney seemed to have found the relationship I had created with the audience particularly thought-provoking which was similarly encouraging, since that aspect of the show had required so much addressing in the early days of the show.

II.4.ii: KCACTF Region 1 Awards

Region 1 of the KCACTF is made up of colleges in the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and a large portion of New York. Hundreds of students from tens of colleges in the region attend the festival in all aspects of the theatrical arts. However, very few productions are invited to the festival; aside from West Connecticut State University’s production of *Evita, Diary of a Madman* was the only full production that travelled to the festival.

Before the play was even shown at the Festival it received two accolades:

- The Merit Award for Publicity Design
  - Presented to Rachel Forcillo ‘18
- The Merit Award for Script Adaptation
  - Presented to Professor Vecsey of the Bates Department of Theater and Dance

Finally, at the concluding awards ceremony, the production was recognized with

- The Golden Hammer Award
  - Presented to Bates College to acknowledge demonstration of skill in and knowledge of backstage practices.

Most recently, on March 14th, we were notified that the production had received four more awards from the national level:
● The Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Award
  ○ Presented to the Bates College production of *Diary of a Madman*, “for insisting that theatrical production is central to the urgent community, national and international conversations on the campuses of higher education nationwide”

● Distinguished Production of a New Work
  ○ Presented to the Bates College production of *Diary of a Madman*

● Distinguished Sound Design and Composition
  ○ Presented to Professor William Matthews of the Bates Department of Music

● Distinguished Scenic Design
  ○ Presented to Professor Michael Reidy of the Department of Theater and Dance

Although the production team was somewhat disappointed to discover that the Kennedy Center no longer accepts full productions in their national festival in Washington, D.C., receiving as many accolades as it did was an honor, and participating in KCACTF was a worthwhile way to show this theatrical work to a wider audience.
Conclusion

This thesis project provided me with two opportunities that I have never before been able to approach in my theatrical career: the ability to work on an original text, and to perform a solo show. These two elements of the project granted me a large amount of influence over the final product, and although this entire production was an extraordinary team effort, I felt a great sense of ownership over the show. As a student and as an actor, it was a culmination and showcase of all of the skills I have been gaining over my entire education.

As a student, engaging in the preparation for this thesis allowed me to enhance and refine my capabilities in research and analysis, and even became the pathway for me to gain new skills. For instance, before signing on to this project, I had never before written a grant proposal. I was also able to challenge myself personally by pursuing study in a foreign country, and by creating and maintaining professional and personal contacts while there.

Furthermore, participating in a new one man show from its very conception to the time the proverbial curtain rises allowed me, as an actor, to ground myself in the art. The creative freedom in this development of the show allowed me to discover what I appreciated in live theater—for instance, during my viewings of Russian theater, I was particularly struck by technological innovations and examples of “scenic disrespect”, and incorporated them into the final product. Working on an original script, my experience as an actor also allowed me to more reliably adapt text into lines that would believably be said by someone in this day and age. From an academic perspective and having read several of Gogol’s works before beginning the rehearsal process, I was able to identify powerful Gogolian themes in the original text and transfer them into the adapted script.
Additionally, the actual experience of being on stage alone for an hour truly tested my capabilities as an actor. The role required enough energy to keep the audience engaged and to portray Everyman’s descent, but not so much energy that I wore myself out before the end of the show. It also required that I use the skills I gained while studying at the Moscow Art Theater School. The use of etudes as a preparatory tool, the stage combat training, and the theory of Droznin movement were all vital to the success of this performance, ensuring that I was physically and mentally prepared to handle such a demanding show.

In reflecting on this process, one aspect that particularly stands out to me is the importance of research—cultural and textual research certainly, but particularly character research. Never before had I researched a role so thoroughly, or used other performances and characters to influence my work on stage. I learned that this is a valuable and vital tool in developing both a character and a style of performance, and I plan on using it as a resource in future theatrical endeavors.

However, there are also elements that I would have liked to improve on if ever given the opportunity to perform a solo show again. *Diary of a Madman* is an extremely demanding piece on all levels, but particularly vocally. After many rehearsals and all performances, I found my voice extremely hoarse. Professor Vecsey is a voice specialist and often checked in to see if I felt like I was supporting my voice, but while keeping my lines, blocking, and intentions in mind during performances, I would often unintentionally relegate my vocal health to a last priority. After nearly losing my voice entirely before my performances at West Connecticut State University, I realized how dangerous a lack of vocal care can be. If given the opportunity to approach a similar show, I would attempt to regard my vocal care as highly as my development of the text, my physical training, and my character research.
I cannot be certain that I will ever participate in another one man show. However, participating in this solo thesis performance has allowed me to develop artistic and scholastic abilities that I did not know I was lacking before starting this project. I began to understand the process of developing new work, which is frequently a necessary skill for young actors beginning their professional life. With the help of the Bates College Department of Theater and Dance, I was able to employ the synthesis of literary, theatrical, cinematic, and human resources from a variety of cultural backgrounds to create Diary of a Madman and present it to audiences at Bates College and as part of the Region 1 KCACTF. From beginning to end, it was an eye-opening and challenging experience, and one that I am not soon to forget.
To: Phillips Fellowship Program Committee

From: Nathaniel Stephenson
Bates College Class of 2018
Majors: Theater/French and Francophone Studies

January 25, 2017

Diary of a Madman: Russian Theatrical and Cultural Contextualization in Moscow

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like this proposal for a grant in the amount of $4500 to be considered by the Phillips Fellowship Program Committee in order to help to fund a research project in Moscow, Russia this summer. I have recently been accepted to the International Foundation for Theatre Education and Research (IFTER)’s six-week summer theatre intensive program at the Moscow Art Theatre School (MATS) from May 20-July 3, 2017. My enthusiasm for this program is stems in part from the fact that I have been approached by Bates Theater faculty member Dr. Katalin Vecsey about the possibility of a collaborative project to be carried out between her and myself during my senior year to serve as my honors performance thesis in theater.

Project

Professor Vecsey and I hope to adapt Nikolai Gogol’s 1835 short story “Diary of a Madman” into a contemporary version for the stage, to be performed as a one man show in the Black Box Theatre as my honors acting thesis. As part of this process, we will be updating the
language (most English translations are marked by an incongruous 19th century upper-class British vocabulary) and treatment of mental health issues. The current political climate between the United States of America and the Russian Federation is another facet of this study in which I am greatly interested, and hope to learn more about while attending MATS, with the potential of incorporating this knowledge into the adaptation. Additionally, actor dialect work (potentially performing the piece in an authentic Russian accent), and the obvious staging requirements will be examined through the lens of a contemporary piece of Russian theater.

**Project Goals**

Through the MATS summer intensive, I will be able to accomplish several objectives; my goals are tripartite. Through my research this summer, not only will I become trained in several styles of Russian theatrical theory, including Droznin movement, the Stanislavski acting method, Russian folk dance and ballet, and stage combat, but I will also attend a multitude of enriching cultural events: live performances at The Bolshoi Theatre, a tour of Melekhovo (Anton Chekhov’s estate), and a visit to the Kremlin as well as to Gogol Center, named after Nikolai Gogol himself. These two goals of artistic growth and cultural immersion help to spur my final goal: the adaptation of an existing work to fit new mediums. The ability to take part in the spearheading of a new creative endeavor, something I have yet to attempt as an artist, holds a myriad of exciting possibilities. Through the IFTER/MATS summer theater intensive, I hope to gain the cultural context and theatrical skill required to undertake this project, as well as build a network of artistic and academic contacts to help me access on-site resources which would be otherwise unavailable to me.
Personal Interest and Prerequisites

I have been involved in Bates’ theater department since my first semester, and since then, have participated in thesis shows, faculty-directed mainstage productions, and “Stages for All Ages” musicals. As a freshman, I traveled abroad to Budapest and Prague during Short Term with Professor Vecsey and Professor Martin Andrucki for the “Central European Theater and Film” class, spurring an interest in the theater and artistic styles of the region, which I hope to further pursue and hone this summer. In fact, Tamás Keresztes, an actor who I saw in a Hungarian-language production of Molière’s *The Miser* at the Katona Theater in Budapest is currently performing in a Hungarian translation of Gogol’s “Diary of a Madman”, adapted for the stage. One hundred and eighty-two years later, the story still holds power and relevance. Additionally, I took an internship last summer as an apprentice at the widely-renowned Williamstown Theatre Festival, a job which was an incredible experience as a glimpse into the world of professional theater, but as my job was greatly labor-intensive rather than artistically-oriented, my growth as an artist was somewhat restricted. Most recently, I was involved as an actor in Samuel Wheeler’s directing thesis project “The Pillowman”; a cooperative effort, but one that did not allow me total creative liberty. The training and the opportunities to meet Russian artists and historians provided by MATS will hone my prior experiences to allow me to create something truly unique with the Bates community and the world. I would also like to mention that this program offers “up to six credit hours [which] may be available through Butler University for an additional fee” (http://ifter.org/programs/mats/)—however, I am on track to graduate in the spring of 2018, and have no desire or need to incur the extra costs to pursue the credit. The MATS program is only “academic” in that the acquirement of new skills in the acting process requires a constant process of trial and error guided by a more experienced performer.
Proposed Research Timeline

May 5: Finish IES Abroad Program in Nantes, France
May 20: Travel from CDG Airport in Paris, France to SVO Airport in Moscow, Russia
June 9-12: Cultural Immersion Trip to St. Petersburg
July 3: Return to USA, SVO Airport to JFK International Airport, NY
July 17: Project reflection/research summary paper due
July 18-September 5 Revising and adapting text for staging
September 6: Fall 2017 semester, rehearsal process with Professor Vecsey begins

Budget Proposal

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<td>- Tuition for acting, dance, movement, voice, and history workshops, six days a week for six weeks/translators</td>
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<td>- Bus Tour of Moscow</td>
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As elaborated here, this program is a costly one. However, this intensive has the power to provide me with untold amounts of growth as a performer, as a creator, and as any international experience does, as a world citizen. The expanded frame of reference provided by a prolonged stay in a country whose relevance to life in the United States grows with each passing day is especially valuable, and the ability reshape that culture into a piece of art available to the public is an experience I greatly look forward to. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Stephenson
## Appendix B

### Diary of a Madman Rehearsal Schedule

### September 2017

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Appendix C

Diary of a Madman KCACTF Region 1/Festival 50 Response Session

Friday, February 2, 2018
9:00am

Attending from the production:
Nathaniel Stephenson ’18 (actor), Rebecca Berger ’19 (Stage manager), Kati Vecsey (Adaptor and Director)

Respondents:
Michelle Bombe, Hope College, Michigan, National Vice Chair of the KCACF
Former KCACF chair of Region 3
https://hope.edu/directory/people/bombe-michelle/index.html

Patrick Dizney, Central Washington University, and KCACF chair of Region 7
http://www.cwu.edu/theatre/patrick-dizney-mfa

Michelle: Well, I guess I’ll just start by, since you guys are relatively new to this process, as part of KCACF, we really feel like these responses are the goal. So we can just have a chance to talk about the work, because I think too often we don’t take time out in our busy college schedules to really talk about this. It is so fabulous that you were able to bring it to the festival, because I think, first of all, there’s nothing like an audience of theater-goers. It’s also just to expose students, this work, is obviously something they’re not going to see every day. I’m really thankful that you brought it.

Introductions, etc.

Michelle: I’d like to start to talk about the show, the way I feel about the space. I was very intrigued, I come from a design background, I was trained as an actor in undergrad, and then moved into design, so I kind of float back and forth between the two. Aesthetically, I loved the set, and I want to be intrigued always when I come into the theater, like “what is this going to be?”, so aesthetically, I really liked the idea. At first I was like, “Man, he’s really close. He’s really close to us”. But then, I got it. It was part of the concept. We were with you, trapped in this.

Patrick: I was also really intrigued because, here you are, in our presence, and here we know our place in the world, right? Where we go, what our role is, at the beginning. And for me, in my experience, as students begin to sit down and they have six, seven minutes and they have the opportunity. There was an approximation, an experience, in other words, I felt like they had permission to do that, we all have permission to do that, we were part of the world now in a way that I don’t think really resonated and registered with a lot of people. They were like, “oh, we’re
here to see a show”, and here I’m on my small screen and you’re up there blogging, at the same time, we’re all kind of…ok…we shouldn’t maybe separate ourselves from this. Which I think is probably a healthy thought for us to have at the beginning.

I also was intrigued by the set. I’m a huge fan of clean lines, simplicity, beauty…. I see the workstation and I see the bench, and I’m kind of beginning to think towards, cell, and these things are starting to creep into my mind. This wall of media, is it penetrable, is it un-penetrable. We were all in a black and white motif. On some level, from my experience of it, monochromatics, I think on some levels it was not so much about age, as it was how you look at things before we color them in. Before we actually kind of flush it out.

Michelle: For me, the texture, the lighting design, was really helpful in that. I couldn’t really tell, it looked to me like there was this shiny wall behind the monitors, but it wasn’t, it was probably those cans you were talking about, but it gave this reflective quality that I thought was really helpful, because this hard surface. So, that was really interesting to me. I have to say, I really don’t have any other notes for lighting throughout, which I think is a good thing. It was what it needed to be, I never thought it needed anything else, sometimes it can take you out.

Patrick: I have two observations if we’re going to talk about lighting for a second. And again, just observations. I thought for a second about the light on the front row, it felt like it was intentional because there were audience members in light and I thought well, is that a “well, we’re taking our show here and didn’t quite add seats at the last minute to accommodate”, or is that intentional? And of course, I always decide that if it’s in there, it must be intentional. And there wasn’t really a hard line, it was in the first row and a little bit more as we move back. And then I also had another really interesting note about lights, and I just thought about it in your deconstruction I guess we can call it, the relationship of the light and your personal skin tone, Nate. You know what I mean? I felt like we were moving towards kind of a jaundiced look, but your complexion is so clear and clean it just doesn’t want to take that light so well. I thought it was interesting, I wondered at moments about, in this deconstruction, in another world where we have all of our tools, and the tool belt, and the garage, and anything else available to us, if there might have been some interesting directional considerations to help assist the narrative progression in the process. But it felt like, environmentally, we were spot-on, as we progressed.

Michelle: And I know the spill thing, is like a lighting designer’s…especially in a small space like this, you know, almost impossible not have some of it. Do you know, in your space at home—

Kati: We have to move those rows, on the risers, because we moved out the seats from the sides to the front, and you know because this is so much bigger space. And the monitors are different, so on each side, information on the monitors is not the same. So the people couldn’t see the monitors on the side, so we moved the three rows, on the floor, so we had to add those.

Rebecca: Also we were told that we weren’t allowed to re-focus the lights when we got into the space, because they are using it for other performances later this week.

Michelle: That’s weird.
Patrick: Actually, there’s no rule on that.

Kati: So we did very little with the lighting—

Patrick: And it does obviously, affect your relationship with the art. Are we in the framework? Are we out of the framework?

Kati: —and even my lighting designer told me, the lights aren’t going to be as great as when we were at Bates. So I knew it going into this.

Patrick: But not even shutter, not re-focused, not shutter. That’s interesting.

Michelle: That’s really weird. We’ll chat with them. And to segue into costumes, there’s always that, this is not directed at costumes, but in any production, there’s always that initial few moments where you are trying to figure out where we are, when we are, what is the style of this piece, what is this? And I have to say that maybe, it took me a little longer to know where I was, because of the tie. That felt really 1950s with that really skinny tie, and then I was clearly like, oh no, this is now. So that took me just a minute. And maybe that’s ultra-fashionable now and I don’t know that? So you’re designer might have been right on- it just threw me for a second, like where am I?

Kati: He’s also the guy though, that doesn’t spend much money on clothes. He has a crappy rain jacket, so he could have gotten that tie from the Salvation Army or something, so he’s definitely standing out from all the other tower workers.

Michelle: Sure. But I’m just saying that you have such an iconic tie, that it just throws me into that time period. So, it was a tiny moment.

Patrick: I did struggle with place, but it was for a different reason. I think it has to do with the relationship with the videography. Are we in your mind? Are we in the blogosphere? Are we in an actual work station? An actual cell? And I felt like all design elements were pointed towards a kind of a self-sustaining world that really didn’t need that definition, you could be kind of anywhere, but what threw me off was your relationship to the videos. Were we seeing your thoughts? Were you in control of them, and commanding them? Were you aware of what the audience was seeing? And so I began to kind of wander in terms of where, what that was? I think there was clear intention in the design, in terms of that, I guess I wasn’t sure, and I might have missed, as a human being, your relationship. So if you are conjuring- that’s a different, right? There’s kind of a nod to possibly, or if it’s discovery, or if a thought pops up- there’s the breath, “let me tell you about this”, right? I kind of lost that relationship at times, with the videography. I think it did help me a little bit in terms of establishing how we felt about those impulses. At times they were painful, at times they were joyous. At times they were... all of those things.

Michelle: I think as a design sense, I think it was really successful. It was hard to do. It’s a really hard line between having all that visual information, but I think in this piece you were successful with that. The times it was the most successful, I think is when it made a complete picture. I
thought those were great. I understood when you were trying to show me information on the screens, and again I’m sitting in the back row, so I have a different visual image of that. But then it was like, to me, not as clean of a picture. I get that it didn’t need to be a picture, but it was showing me…like the emails. When those were up, it wasn’t as clean a look, visually, as everything else. So it was just a few things, on the whole, I just really thought you were really right on and I really want to congratulate, I saw that a student who did all the photography? That was fabulous. Really fabulous. I thought especially the choices, the daughter, were right on, without being gross or lascivious– it could have gone that way, you know? But they were just really clear images, right on, appropriate. I didn’t think the video worked as well of your coworker? I’m not sure I know why I think that.

Patrick: I chose to temper it through, I guess as an audience member, it was different information for each person in the house. And that’s the beauty of what we do. I chose to filter it through the lens of this is how things come to our mind. There is not necessarily logic or clarity-

Michelle: I was talking aesthetically more. Whether it was the angles, the lighting, those videos – something about those videos. But as a video itself, I was on board with it.

Patrick: I thought it was a creative use of imagery, sense of humor, and those moments of fixation that we have in the mind and imagery. What we remember about a specific important moment in time. It felt like it walked a nice line between honoring that meta, that awareness of how it’s related to the story-telling. And that was fun. Because I think you heard the audience respond, and I’m sure it was the same at home.

Michelle: The rain.

Patrick: Yes, the rain was lovely. I loved the rain.

Michelle: And again, did not really take me out. It was, it was…

Patrick: Integral.

Michelle: And it changed just enough. I really like how it worked.

Patrick: And I want to say one more thing about that, I think that, when we get new toys, we tend to overuse the shit out of them. You could have really gone that way, and I thought it was a really judicious use of video that served the story well. It kept the focus where it was most important.

Kati: It was very interesting in the process to decide what to put on the screens. Because as Patrick said, do we need to reference every single thought? Do we need to reference every single moment? Too much or not? It was really interesting to find a balance.

Patrick: I thought you guys did a nice job. It didn’t need more. Because that still invites me to participate in the story telling.
Michelle: Just jumping into the story, I just loved the adaptation. Thank you so much. I would have said that my personal taste...I would have been like “oh no, no”, but I was intrigued. It was pulling me in all kinds of ways, and I was always aware of the fact that this was 1835. I loved that I was going back and forth in my head while I was watching it and thinking about where we are in our own political times. So relevant in so many ways. So I think the adaptation was fabulous. And I just can’t say enough to you about how skillful you were in understanding the tone and the style. It makes perfect sense now that I know you spent some time in Moscow. It was just very honest and the danger in this kind of piece is that you’re telling a story, right? So there isn’t any action, there’s not a conflict with another person. I wrote down several times that I thought you really very successful in creating a sense of urgency, changing the pace, changing the rhythm, inviting me in to hear this story. I think it was a great meeting of these two talents because I’m not sure that your average college student could pull this off.

Patrick: I also thoroughly enjoyed the adaptation because it felt extremely accessible to me. I read the story probably 40 years ago. I was curious, and I do have a question more for my edification, not anything to do with the response. What was the accessibility and what I felt was true to the story was that it sensed some irony and the way it captures the combination of Russian humor and nihilistic pathos that only Russians seem to capture in their writing and theater and we are laughing as we see the barn door close on you. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It wall worked really really well for me. I do want to comment on the sound, I thought that the composition and combination of sound and composed music served the story really well.

Michelle: What I loved about the composition was that it was quirky and bizarre. It lulled me out of anything familiar. It was like an alternate reality even though it’s your reality. One of the things as a theater maker, my best compliment is “wow I could have never thought of that.” Like how something is totally right. It was very helpful.

Patrick: I want to make sure we cover everything. I totally appreciated the load. I think for me experiencing it in the theater, your strongest point was your rapport and ease with the audience. It wasn’t forced at all. It was easy, it was conversational, it was on our level, it was meeting us at a place where we weren't being felt put upon or anything like that and I thought that was really lovely. There's a couple of moments where I felt like, even though we are relaying a story, I missed at times the impulse for the next moment of the story. That breathe of image. It brings with it, a little bit more dynamic but that natural impulse that kind of comes with breathe or imager or what hits us next and how. There were other moments that you absolutely nailed it. Like “King of Spain,” because the excitement of that moment. Longed for more moments like that. Concerned for vocal instrument, the fatigue. Ensuring that you had the tools for even with the tools the fatigue happens, but making sure we’re taking care of ourselves the best that we can.

Michelle: Going back to the screens, I think that the other really successful part was the mother. It was a tribute to what was happening in the story that I was getting creeped out in such a way.

Patrick: The question that I was alluding to is ‘how do we as actors make that objective immediate. How do we put it in the room in which we’re all observing because I pay or get conned to go to theater to watch characters make discoveries on stage. I that at the end of the
day, that’s really what I wanna see. I wanna see you suffer at least as much as I do because it makes me feel better about my own like on some level.’ So how we play, vent it a tricky one. If Siri is the way through to your salvation or whatever that is, it keeps you active in the moment. How it characters, the character’s sense/awareness of mental degradation. There’s all these layers of how we take these objectives and moments. Identifying these moments where… Your relationship with your superior’s daughter was crystal clear, I knew your objectives in this relationship. When you were dealing with the emails with the dogs, it was clear. You surpass the telling of the story and we’re now in the story on some level. We vacillate back and forth. There’s moments where we step out to look at that moment. I applaud your honesty, your accessibility, your vulnerability throughout. I think you really kinda laid yourself out there and open to do stuff. Beautifully. So much to celebrate, so much growth for you as an artist. That’s just amazing, for all of you guys.

I had some questions for you Kati. I was unclear of the choice, because I wasn’t sure what my role was, almost every time he left the cell. I didn’t know if a bomb had been dropped and I needed time to process what had happened so that we move into the next thing, if it was an extremely pragmatic choice to have him go off-stage to undress. Transitions are a big choice and is it a ‘we’re moving to the next chapter.’? I was confused at times about my relationship to that and I wondered at times if the entirety of the action remained on whether you had explored that or not, or if he had just stayed all on stage at once. What it did for me was that it felt like it shattered the walls of the prison for me every time he left. It was like, ‘Oh, he’s not really captured. He could go.’ He’s free and he has the power to move into the screens and everything else. That’s how I experienced those transactions.

Kati: I will tell you what my intention was. It’s a diary, so obviously every single diary that he writes has a date entry. And you can see the deterioration in the dates. So my idea was that I wanted him to take it out of the space. You don’t really know if he is sitting in his office or is this his house, or what is he actually sitting in? I came up with the transition idea because of the dates. So he starts a new scene with every single entry. And when the doors open, that’s when he steps into the asylum. So that’s why we need that scene change, and the interesting part- we did it in a small theater, and the screens were this way, instead of being toward the audience, so he was even more closed in. So it was like a small room in the asylum. So I think with the scene changes and moving him in and out, I tried to show time is passing by if you couldn’t see the date or the screens.

Patrick: And I’m one person.

Kati: But, it’s something to think about- thank you for that note.

Michelle: I think for me, it just let me off the hook a little bit about the relentlessness of this situation.

Kati: Because in the original story, he’s always at home and writing these diary entries at home after work. So he sits in his house, and it’s deteriorating and everything is deteriorating. And he just writes these entries. And then he’s taken away.
Michelle: For you, as a stage manager, it sounds like you were able to kind of participate in this kind of full process in a way that stage managers sometimes don’t get to do.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Michelle: So, calling the show was more of a … it’s just you.

Rebecca: It’s just me.

Michelle: You’re not actually calling it, just pressing?

Rebecca: Just pressing, reading along with the script. When you press the spacebar, everything— sound, lights, all the images, videos, were all connected.

Michelle: How long does it take you to get accustomed to the rhythm of, or how long it takes from when you press to when the technology is actually happening? Because those relationships are really important. Was that a learning curve?

Rebecca: Definitely. We had an elongated tech process. Usually techs are done over a weekend, but because this was so tech heavy we did it over the course of a week. So that was really nice, because I got to get more of a feel for the cues and everything. Some of the videos, of the people talking, happen immediately when I press the spacebar, and some of them take a little while, so you just have to sort of feel it out.

Michelle: Thanks. We’ve seen a lot of theater this week, and they don’t always stay with you, but I think this will stay with me for a long time.
Appendix D
Original poster for *Diary of a Madman*, designed by Rachel Forcillo ‘18
Appendix E

Diary of a Madman

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES AT BATES

Fall Dance Concert
December 2-4, 2017 – Schaeffer Theater
A collection of professional dance pieces by repertory artists

The Theater of Sound
December 6, 2017 – Gannett Theater
Students in Kati Vecsey’s Voice and Speech Class present their final projects

An Evening of Opposites - Original Monologues
December 4, 2017 – Gannett Theater
Final Presentation by students in Tim Dugan’s Beginning Acting course

An Afternoon of Monologues and Scenes
December 6, 2017 – Gannett Theater
Final Presentation by students in Tim Dugan’s Advanced Acting course

For more information, please visit www.bates.edu/theater/season or call the Bates Box Office at 207-786-6161. batestheateranddance.eventbrite.com
CAST
Everyman ................................................. Nathaniel Stephenson ’18*

VOICE-OVERS
Chief of Staff ............................................. Michael Somkuti ’19
President ...................................................... Prof. Michael Murray
Sophie .......................................................... Amanda Sobota ’19
Intern .............................................................. Ben Roop ’18
Young girl ....................................................... Maddy Clark ’20

This performance is offered in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an Honors Senior Thesis in Theater.

There will be no intermission.


This Production has been entered as a participant in The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. For more information, please visit: http://www.kcaeft.org/ and http://web.kennedy-center.org/

DIRECTOR'S NOTE
"Diary of a Madman" is a short story written by the Russian author Nikolai Gogol in 1835. The story dramatizes the gradual descent of the low ranking clerk Poprischin into madness and eventual confinement in an asylum. It is a satire about the fate of the faceless, 19th-century Russian everyman.

The dark irony of Poprischin’s psychological collapse, written 182 years ago, appears surprisingly contemporary when we reset the time frame from the nineteenth century czarist Russia to the present day. Update the bureaucratic structure, replace the horse-drawn carriage with a limousine, introduce computers and iPhones, substitute Siti for Mavra the servant, and let Poprischin be a 21st-century blogger. Suddenly, we can relate to his ranting and private thoughts. Poprischin’s entrapment in a senseless bureaucracy, his grandiose personal ambitions, his unrequited love for his boss’s daughter; all become real, maybe even familiar.

The character’s journey from wistful, melancholic isolation to a serious, psychotic breakdown provides a great opportunity for an actor. I chose to direct this play to enable Nate to demonstrate his considerable talent as an actor, and to challenge him to grow as an artist and as an individual. I have thoroughly enjoyed working on this production with Nate and our stage manager, Rebecca Berger ’19. Every single day has been a pleasure.

Tonight you will see only one actor on stage, but his performance is made possible by many other people behind the scenes. Theater is a collaborative art form and, as the director of this production, I am truly indebted to my colleagues: to Michael Reidy, Senior Lecturer in Theater, for his production concept and brilliant video-wall set design; to Bill Matthews, Alice SwansonEsty Professor of Music, who composed original music; to Daniel Paseltiner ’16, our Tech Guru, who on many occasions saved the day. I would like to express my gratitude to Justin Moriarty for building the set with the work-study students, and to Carol Farrell, Costume Shop Supervisor, for her costume design. Any misinterpretations of the adaptation and production are my responsibility.

Kari Vecsey

SPECIAL THANKS
Bates Faculty Development Fund
Phillips Student Fellowship
Dennis Browne, Associate Professor, Russian and European Studies
Michael Murray, Charles Franklin Phillips Professor of Economics
Christopher Schiff, Music and Arts Librarian, Information and Library Services
Andrew White, Interim Vice President for Information and Library Services
Kevin Poland, Network Infrastructure Project Manager
Colin Kelley, Senior Academic Technology Consultant
Ben Lietzke, Senior Audio Visual Analyst
Benjamin Pinkham, Audio Visual Analyst
Professor Emeritus Eric Wollman, Trish Buls, and their dog Io
Professor Heidi Taylor and her dog Theo

PRODUCTION STAFF
Visual Concept and Set Design .................................................... Michael Reidy
Assistant Designer ................................................................. Eva Goldstein ’18
Stage Manager ................................................................. Rebecca Berger ’19
Composer and Sound Designer .................................................. Bill Matthews
Lighting Design ................................................................. Michael Reidy
Prop Master ........................................................ .......... Saleha Belgaumi ’18
Poster Illustration .............................................................. Rachel Foretlo ’18
Graphic Design .............................................................. Lily Kip ’19

BOX OFFICE STAFF
Box Office/House Manager .................................................... Tessa Black ’20

FOR BATES COLLEGE
Managing Director ................................................................. Michael Reidy
Assistant Technical Director .................................................. Justin Moriarty
Costume Shop Supervisor ..................................................... Carol Farrell
Academic Admin. Asst./Publicity/Program .................................. Elisha Allman
Custodian ................................................................. Ed Woodhead
Appendix F

SLIDESHOW: GOGOL’S ‘DIARY OF A MADMAN’ MOVES TO THE 21ST CENTURY

By Phyllis Graber Jensen — Published on November 9, 2017

In Nikolai Gogol’s 1835 short story “Diary of a Madman,” a low-level Russian civil servant descends into madness.

Now on stage in the Black Box Theater, a Bates adaptation of the story puts a contemporary twist on the strikingly familiar tale.

The play, adapted by Senior Lecturer in Theater Katalin Vecsey, is set in the present day — Siri replaces a servant and the main character blogs instead of journals — and the set features video walls that display the inner workings of Everyman’s mind as he loses his grip on reality.

But the story that this high-tech production helps tell — one of isolation, unrealized ambitions, unrequited love, and mental illness — is timeless.

Nate Stephenson ’18 of Ellsworth, Maine, plays Everyman as part of his honors thesis in theater. Professor of Music Bill Matthews composed original music for the play.

In Diary of a Madman, Nate Stephenson ’18 plays “Everyman,” a low-level employee who descends into madness. His performance is part of his senior honors thesis in theater. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)
Stephenson’s Everyman works in the office of the president of an unidentified company. Though the setting is the contemporary United States, the play is based on an 1835 short story by Russian playwright Nikolai Gogol. Senior Lecturer in Theater Katalin Vecsey adapted the story for the stage. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)

In the play, the Everyman is in awe of his boss, mistrusts interns and coworkers, and is in love with the boss’ daughter. The outside examiner for Stephenson’s thesis will be Dassia Posner ’94, a Northwestern professor and expert in Russian theater. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)
The Everyman believes he can learn more about the boss’ daughter by intercepting emails written by one dog to another. Though Stephenson is the only onstage actor, Professor of Economics Michael Murray, Amanda Sobotka ’19, Ben Roop ’18, and Maddy Clark ’20 have voice roles. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College).

With his work, personal life, and love interest going nowhere, the Everyman comes to believe he is the King of Spain. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College).
As part of the short story’s translation to the stage and the modern world — a carriage becomes a limousine, a housekeeper becomes Siri, the main character blogs instead of journals — the set includes walls of monitors that display the Everyman’s mind. The monitors and software were funded by Bates’ Information & Library Services and designed by Senior Lecturer in Theater Michael Reidy. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)
The Everyman ends up being committed, believing he is watched over by the Grand Inquisitor of Spain. Last summer, Stephenson received a Phillips Student Fellowship to study theater in Moscow. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)

_Diary of a Madman_ will be performed in the Black Box Theater from Nov. 9 to Nov. 13. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)
Appendix G

Diary of a Madman: From 1835 to 2017

ARIEL ABONIZIO  ASSISTANT ARTS & LEISURE EDITOR

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Diary of a Madman was a show to remember. The performance happened from Thursday, November 9 through Tuesday, November 14 in the Black Box Theater; I was afraid tickets would be sold out completely, but I managed to sign my name for Saturday’s show waitlist. Prior to watching the thought-provoking show, I had already interviewed Nate Stephenson ’18; I knew what to expect. Having watched a couple other pieces of acting by Stephenson, I was sure the acting component of his senior thesis for the Theater Department would be phenomenal. Senior Lecturer in Theater Katalin Vecsey adapted and directed this show based on Nicolai Gogol’s short story from 1835, which bears the same iconic name, “Diary of a Madman.” As I walked in this one-man show, a pair of words from Stephenson’s previous interview echoed in my head: “visceral emotions.”

The original story portrays a working person that is driven insane. He works sharpening pencils in an office but has delusions of grandeur and ambition. After falling in love with his boss’s daughter, he goes progressively insane and ends up in an institution, believing he is the rightful heir to the Spanish throne. As one can imagine, the writing, in diary-like format, is emotionally intense with unique character development. In the adaptation to theater, Stephenson plays “Everyman,” the only, though nameless, character physically in the show.

“It starts off with a guy that is pretty normal; he is a little odd, […] but by the end of it he is a broken human being,” he summarized. Adapted to the 21st century, Stephenson is surrounded by 18 monitors that show dates, text, and images that bombard the audience with an extra input of information. On interview, Stephenson commented on the great timing of the show. With the recent political developments of the Catalan movement for secession, Diary of a Madman was able to use real headlines on the monitors to bring the story to life. Adding further relevance to today’s world, the dates mentioned in the original story, such as Wednesday, October 4, happened to fall on Wednesday this year.

Stephenson spent 6 weeks in Moscow over the summer of 2017 with the Moscow Art Theatre, an organization founded by renowned director and actor Konstantin Stanislavski. During his 42 days in Russia, Stephenson saw 34 shows. He has been engaged in this show since February, when Vecsey extended an invitation to collaborate on this piece. The whole team’s preparation and research was visible in the final product.

Stephenson’s acting is honestly fantastic, especially considering that he is alone on the stage for this hour-long show. Stephenson told me that having all the information for this one show without a partner to bounce off of was a long, but stimulating process. “Relating to the character personally was more difficult for me, because there really is no character. The idea is that something like this could happen to anyone,” Stephenson said. I was astonished to see his mastery; the lines, body score, and emotional intensity rise to what seems to be one of the most challenging pieces of acting I have seen at Bates.

Stephenson mentioned that this show is the closing of a cycle for him. “My first major role at Bates was as Mankind in this play called The Castle of Perseverance,” he mentioned citing the play from Winter Semester, 2015. Playing Everyman in his thesis performance, he finishes his theatrical tenure at Bates through again representing a universal condition.
Stephenson mentioned that this show is the closing of a cycle for him. "My first major role at Bates was as Mankind in this play called The Castle of Perseverance," he mentioned citing the play from Winter Semester, 2015. Playing Everyman in his thesis performance, he finishes his theatrical tenure at Bates through again representing a universal condition.

It has been a pleasure for me to accompany, even if for only a couple of years, the development of Stephenson's acting. For me, Diary of a Madman was a show of cycles, beautifully linking 1835 to 2017, and masterfully connecting an actor to his character.

Stephenson bows after his senior thesis performance. VICTORIA DOBBIN/THE BATES STUDENT

Stephenson '18 poses next to his poster. JAMES MACDONALD/THE BATES STUDENT

Publicity poster for Diary of a Madman. JAMES MACDONALD/THE BATES STUDENT
Appendix H
https://www.bates.edu/news/2018/02/14/gogol-it-diary-of-a-madman-honored-at-prestigious-theater-festival/

When a delegation from the Bates theater department went to a college theater festival in Connecticut last month, their Airbnb lodging turned out to be the erstwhile country getaway for the late king of television variety shows, Ed Sullivan.

The two faculty, one alumnus and four students from Bates were open to any supernatural visitations from Sullivan, but he was a no-show. No matter; For the students, all veterans of the 2017 Bates production of Diary of a Madman, what counted was the real-world show business contacts and experiences they gained at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival.

Those experiences included two KCACTF awards to students, one for achievement in publicity design and a second for mastery of backstage practices.

Members of Bates’ delegation to the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival included Rebecca Berger ’19, left, Diary of a Madman stage manager; director Kati Vecsey, holding the award for her adaptation of Gogol’s short story; actor Nate Stephenson ’18; Michael Reidy, production designer, holding the Golden Hammer Award; and Daniel Pasolitner ’16, who assisted with computer programming. Also shown are Eva Goldstein ’18, assistant Madman designer, second from left; and Rachel Forcillo ’18, right, who received a KCACTF award for her poster design. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)
A third award went to Senior Lecturer in Theater Katalin Vecsey for her stage adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s 19th-century short story.

In March, the Kennedy Center notified Bates that Diary of a Madman had received four additional awards:

- The Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Award, bestowed “for insisting that theatrical production is central to the urgent community, national and international conversations on the campuses of higher education nationwide”;
- Distinguished Production of a New Work;
- Distinguished Sound Design and Composition for the work contributed by Bill Matthews, Alice Swanson Esty Professor of Music;
- and Distinguished Scenic Design, honoring the work done by Michael Reidy, senior lecturer and managing director of theater and dance.

Students are the focus of the festival, which affords opportunities to present work in myriad aspects of theater to a professional audience. For students considering a stage or screen career, both the KCACTF awards and the sheer experience of attending the event are valuable.

“Students get really good feedback on their work,” Vecsey says, “and also good networking opportunities. And it’s a good opportunity to see who does what, and why, and where to go” in the complex, competitive world of show business.

While it’s a student-focused festival, Vecsey does point to professional benefits for the faculty who accompany the students. “It’s good to put yourself into the competition in a way that you can see where you are,” she explains.

“You know, you might be a superstar on your own campus, but as soon as you go to a competition, you realize that, ‘Maybe I really need to do more work.’” (The eight regional festivals send 125 students to compete in the national festival in April in Washington, D.C.)

Stage manager Rebecca Berger ’19 of Bethesda, Md., received the Golden Hammer Award, which recognizes productions that demonstrate exceptional skill in and knowledge of backstage practices, from load-in to load-out.

Requiring three computers, 18 onstage monitors, and more than 1,000 cues, Madman was a bear to build technically — but once built, it was impressively straightforward to stage at the festival, held Jan. 30–Feb. 4 at Western Connecticut State University.
“It was high-tech,” says Vecsey, “but despite that, it was just very easy to load it in, set it up, and and load it out.”

For the Golden Hammer, Berger submitted “the stage management handbook that she made and worked from,” says Vecsey. And that book was assessed by so-called respondents — judges, more or less — whom Vecsey describes as Broadway stage managers.

The third award went to Rachel Forcillo ‘18 of Grosse Pointe, Mich. She received a Merit Award for Publicity for her Madman poster design — a mosaic image that compiles thousands of still photos to depict the face of Nate Stephenson.

For the poster, Vecsey suggested the photo mosaic, which had a counterpart in some of the monitor imagery onstage. For the image that would ultimately be rendered as the mosaic, Forcillo photographed Stephenson on the set, lighting his face from below in classic scary-tales-around-the-campfire fashion.

“The entire time, Kati screamed ‘Be mad! Madder! You are a MADMAN!’ so he’d get into character,” Forcillo says. “I showed her the shot and she was like, ‘That’s the one.'”

Working with photos taken by Grace Link ’19 and edited by Lily Kip ’19, Forcillo painstakingly recolored them to match different regions of the master portrait. Finally, she used an online mosaic generator to match the “tile” photos with the appropriate color regions.

“The entire time, Kati screamed ‘Be mad! Madder! You are a MADMAN!’”

Another student making a strong showing at the KCAC TF was the play’s sole onstage performer, Nathaniel Stephenson ‘18 of Ellsworth, Maine. Not only did he perform Madman twice, but he also auditioned for the esteemed Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship. (Yes, a scholarship established by the actress who played Granny on The Beverly Hillbillies.) Out of a field of 180, Stephenson made it to the semi-finals, in company with 35 other student actors.

One of the two respondents for Madman was Michelle Bombe, national vice chair of the festival and director of the theater program at Hope College in Michigan. “I was able to talk to her about my work,” says Stephenson.

“The importance of connections in the world of professional theater can’t be understated, and the festival is a great place to make them.”
A double major in theater and in French and francophone studies, Stephenson took Vecsey’s Madman adaptation as his project for a six-week summer training at the Moscow Art Theater last year, and it’s the topic of his honors thesis project. He aims to start his professional acting career in Boston after graduation.

The Merit Award for Script Adaptation is the second KCACTF award that Vecsey, who also directed Madman, has received. The first, in 2013, recognized her interdisciplinary collaboration with Bates composer Bill Matthews, Alice Swanson Esty Professor of Music, for the Bates production of 1000 Airplanes on the Roof. Matthews also wrote music for Madman.

What led Vecsey to adapt the Gogol story for the stage? “Growing up during communism in Hungary,” she says, “I loved the Russian literature.”

The story also intrigued her because it is considered one of the earliest literary treatments of schizophrenia. Finally, the notion of adapting a story from 1835 posed a dramaturgical problem that Vecsey found compelling: “How can you make it relevant today? And would an audience perceive it as, ‘Yes, this person is really mentally ill?’”

Part of the challenge, then, involved finding 21st-century equivalents of 19th-century activities. So the protagonist, Everyman (the character that Gogol called Poprishchin) pours his thoughts into a blog instead of the titular diary, for example.
In addition to Stephenson and Berger, Bates students attending the festival were Lila Patinkin ’20, Stephenson’s scene partner in the Irene Ryan Auditions, and Nora Dahlberg ’18, who presented her costume design thesis. They were accompanied by Vescey; Madman production designer Michael Reidy, senior lecturer and managing director of theater and dance; and Daniel Paseltiner ’16, who works in a neuroscience lab at Bates but helped Reidy with programming.

Nate Stephenson ’18 as Everyman. (Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College)
Appendix I
Publicity video by Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College

https://vimeo.com/251405396
Appendix J
Additional production photos by Phyllis Graber Jensen/Bates College

I confer with stage manager Rebecca Berger ’18 during a rehearsal in Black Box Theater.
Professor Katalin Vecsey and Rebecca Berger ‘18 oversee a rehearsal of Scene 5 takes place in a dressing room to allow space for visual and audio cue programming.
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